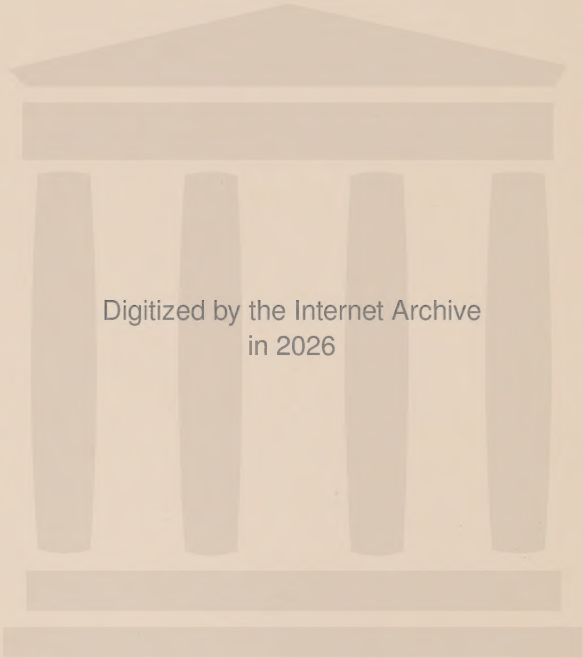
Passion Flower

KATHLEEN NORRIS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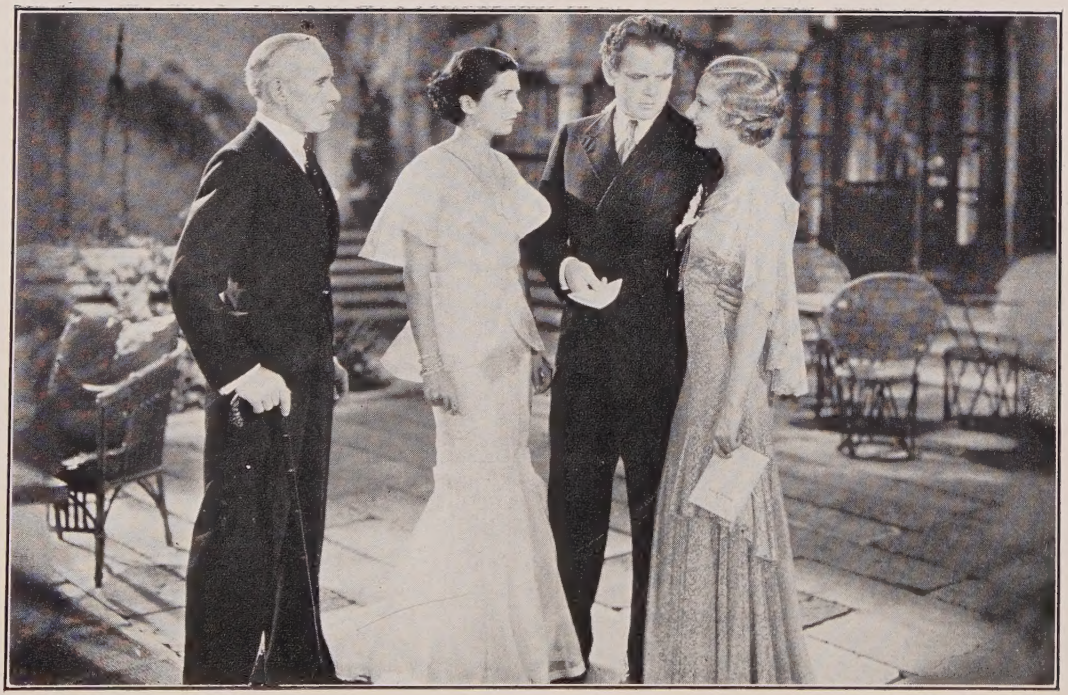
Passion Flower

BOOKS BY

KATHLEEN NORRIS

RED SILENCE
STORM HOUSE
THE FOOLISH VIRGIN
WHAT PRICE PEACE?
BEAUTY AND THE BEAST
THE FUN OF BEING A MOTHER
MY BEST GIRL
BARBERRY BUSH
THE SEA GULL
HILDEGARDE
THE BLACK FLEMINGS
LITTLE SHIPS
NOON
ROSE OF THE WORLD
THE CALLAHANS AND THE MURPHYS
BUTTERFLY
CERTAIN PEOPLE OF IMPORTANCE
LUCRETIA LOMBARD
THE BELOVED WOMAN
HARRIET AND THE PIPER
SISTERS
JOSSELYN'S WIFE
UNDERTOW
MARTIE, THE UNCONQUERED
THE HEART OF RACHAEL
THE STORY OF JULIA PAGE
THE TREASURE
SATURDAY'S CHILD
POOR, DEAR MARGARET KIRBY
THE RICH MRS. BURGOYNE
MOTHER



A scene from the Metro-*Goldwyn*-Mayer All-Talking Picture "Passion Flower," a William de Mille Production.

Passion Flower

By KATHLEEN NORRIS

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TO MY FOSTER-SON

WILLIAM CHARLES NORRIS

With Shakespeare, Conrad, Poe and many another
Give bookshelf space to this abashed newcomer,
Writ by that friend for whom, in life's midsummer,
You give new sweetness to the name of Mother.

Passion Flower

Chapter I

"We ought to have a club and give three dances," Jean Redding said hopefully.

"Oh, two, Jean," Marian Richie protested instantly, from the floor.

The other girls—there were eight of them in the small, bright, pretty drawing room—laughed delightedly.

"Oh, Marian, you're terrible!" said Betty Small. "We talk of trying to get something started, and getting to know nice boys and—well, getting things started, and you act as if it was all *settled*——"

She was purposely being funny, and as she floundered the others all laughed again.

"No, but listen, if we could give a dance——?" Jean pleaded.

They were at her house; she had just been hostess at a luncheon party with bridge to follow; one table had played plain bridge, and the other had experimented hilariously with contract. Then Jean's mother and sister had come in with tea and sandwiches, and it was now nearly six o'clock. The food was demolished, and the pale creamy dregs of tea were cooling in the scattered cups; everybody had to be going at once.

But at the last minute someone had said what fun this was, and what a wonderful idea Jean had had in getting them all together, and someone else had asked why they could not do it again soon. They had all been such friends a few years ago in "high," and it seemed such a shame never to see each other!

"My dear, the months go by, and they are *years,* and we're all getting simply aged!" Edith Whitman, who was feminine and fluttery and who played the violin, exclaimed plaintively and impressively, and they all laughed again.

"Well, I'm twenty-three!" Betty affirmed boldly.

"I know. Isn't it awful!" Marian echoed.

Catherine Pringle looked from one girl to the other quickly, sympathetically, with glowing, serious blue eyes that were black under her black, broad-brimmed hat, but she did not speak. She

was the stranger in this group; Jean's asking her at all had been a surprise to both herself and Jean. They had known each other at school, of course, but they had hardly spoken since. Sometimes, shopping at Christmas time, they met down town in San Francisco, at the Emporium or the White House, and stood laughing and chatting for a few minutes. But there was no friendship between their families.

Jean had told her mother and sister that she was going to ask the Pringle girl; she didn't have to come if she didn't want to! And Mrs. Redding had ventured timidly that she thought that would be nice. There had been quite a flutter at the Redding house when Cassy's note of acceptance had come. She was quite the most important person there; they were all conscious of her.

"No, but listen," Jean now persisted, feeling happy and sociable because her party had been such a success, and filled with an unwonted courage. "Listen, we know we're not in society, and we don't care a snap!"

There was gay laughter.

"Righto!" agreed Margaret Paine, who worked in a library.

"No, but of course we're *not,*" Jean repeated with an appealing look. They all furtively or openly glanced at Cassy to see what her reaction to this was, but Cassy's face was a polite blank. She *was* in society—in a way, Jean thought nervously.

"I mean, we didn't have coming-out parties at the St. Francis," Jean pursued, "and we don't belong to the Burlingame crowd. But why shouldn't we have dances at the Fairmont?"

"We'd probably have a lot more fun than they do!" Marian said of the society débutantes, and everyone agreed with her. Cassy alone said nothing but continued to regard the company with her strangely glowing blue-black eyes.

"Would they cost a horrible lot, Jean?" Margaret asked rather timidly, to the secret relief of more than one of the others.

"I don't know. We could find out!"

Cassy thought of her home—Papa, her mother, her sister Gertrude . . .

They were all talking of hotels, orchestras, eligible men;

Marian had out a neat little notebook and was jotting down suggestions. Someone suggested a name: the Juanita Club—the Western Girls——

"Or we could have the dances at our houses," Betty Small began doubtfully. They looked at the Reddings' parlor, a very nice room, quite wide, with a columned arch going into the dining room, and a fireplace with little white porches at a dozen heights, and strips of mirror.

Again Cassy thought of her house, and she knew they all did. You could have any number of dances, easily, in the Pringle house. She began to feel horribly uncomfortable.

It was a relief when the group scattered. She walked away from Jean's doorway and all its little brass mail boxes quickly, talking to Margaret Paine, of the library, a nice, serious girl. Cassy, in her innocence, made the mistake of supposing that Margaret's father was dead.

"Oh, no, Dad's alive, he's the livest of us all!" Margaret said, with a laugh at some thought suggested by his name. "He's lots of fun," she added. "Why? What made you think he was dead?"

"Oh, nothing," Cassy said hastily. But it had been because it seemed odd that a girl with a living father should work.

She could not but feel superior to Margaret Paine, although Margaret seemed happy enough about it, when Margaret turned into a shabby cottage yard in San José Avenue. The winter evening was dark and cool now, and there were lights in all the houses; shops were gushing light, it was Saturday night. It was not so dark but what Cassy could see that the cottage was of the common pattern: bay window, flowers, and chinks of glowing red in a strip beneath the dining room shades, yellow brilliance from the kitchen window.

"I guess my brother's in the dining room doing his home work," said Margaret, quite unashamed.

Left alone, Cassy walked on, not too fast, for she was in no hurry to get home. Her heart always experienced a chill, a certain shrinking, when she turned at her own corner. She hated to leave the friendly, busy, lighted world of Saturday night and enter the

darkness and silence of the Guerrero Street house. Mission Street was flashing with radiance, movies, restaurants, drug stores, all going full blast. Cassy turned her back upon it and began to think about her father and Mamma and Gertrude.

The Pringle house stood three stories high, lifted upon a dark old bulkhead and looming close over the sidewalk like a menace. It had been built far back in its own park fifty years before, but the topography of San Francisco's streets had changed since then.

Now it looked crowded, awkward, and grotesque, a great unbalanced bulk in the night. The downstairs rooms were all dark, viewed from the street, but the fanlight over the hall doorway showed a strange, dull, sanguine color, and upstairs there was a bright light in the bathroom, and a dull one in the big bedroom in front.

Cassy mounted old wooden steps, between bulging bulkheads dimly draped with vines, and walked around the house on a brick path that had buckled itself into dangerous humps and hollows. In the winter dark she smelled decaying leaves; a palm tree, high above her head in the blackness, clashed its spears drearily.

She felt her way to the side entrance and stepped into a close, cold hall smelling of apples, dust, decaying wood. A dim light in a red glass globe evenly blistered burned against a stained side wall. The hallway was narrow and arched; it gave upon a larger hall from which the dining room and library and parlors opened. Through the wide doorway into the dining room, Cassy could see Keno setting the table. She was ballooning the cloth, it sank limp and crooked, and Keno ballooned it again, and again it sank all to one side.

Cassy saw no more; she went on through the front hall and mounted the stairs. They were not wide stairs, but they had a pretentious curve and sweep; they were carpeted in red with old brass rods; they rose steeply and disappeared into darkness above. The ceilings in the Pringle house were very high, which gave the rooms a narrow-shouldered feeling.

Familiar smells. Dusty, carpety, cold foody smells, and presently the penetrating thread of carbolic through them all.

A man of sixty came out into the upper hall and raised his hand to turn up the gas bead over his head. Cassy was startled; her father did not usually come home until late on Saturday afternoons. He went to the club on Saturdays and played dominoes.

"What's all this mean?" he said coldly.

"I don't understand," Cassy countered innocently.

"This staggering in at this hour?" her father demanded.

"Staggering!" she said proudly, quickly.

"Well—well——" he said nervously and impatiently.

She knew he was neither angry nor interested; just cross.

"I was playing bridge at Jean Redding's, Papa." Her tone grew sympathetic. "No dominoes?" she asked.

"No," he answered briefly. "And do girls play cards until after six in these days and then walk the streets alone?" he asked. But his tone was a shade mollified, and Cassy, who knew every gradation of it, took heart. "Your mother and I were anxious about you," he said severely.

"I'm sorry," she said blithely, readily. She could say it as easily as draw her breath and mean as little by it.

"Cassy——" began her father impressively, and paused.

"Sir?"

"Folker has gone."

"Folker?" She was surprised. She turned—a tall, glowing brown girl in a handsome coat with a beaver collar, and a wide-brimmed black hat—and looked at him interestedly.

"He was imp'dent to Papa," Mrs. Pringle, small, faded, infinitely tired, timid, and drab, came out into the hall to contribute meekly.

"Folker was?" Leroy Pringle asked roundly, in his full, pompous voice. Cassy saw that her unfortunate mother was trapped again and gave her father a scornful look. Mrs. Pringle trembled and fluttered.

"Why—why, didn't you say so, Papa?" she faltered.

"No, I said nothing of the kind!" the man answered flatly and firmly. He looked over his glasses patiently. "I wanted to speak to Cassy," he suggested politely.

"Oh, go right ahead, Papa! I thought you'd finished."

"No, I hadn't finished," Leroy Pringle said, and sighed. He turned toward the stairs. "It's of no consequence!" he said indifferently.

"Please, Papa——"

Cassy remained in the hall only long enough to see the majestically descending head go down into the great vacuum of the stairway; then she looked at her mother, shrugged, smiled sardonically, and crossed the hall to her own room. Mrs. Pringle trailed forlornly after her.

"I thought he was in a real good mood this morning, but I guess something went wrong at the club!" she said in a whisper, following the girl in.

Cassy took off her handsome beaver-collared coat and hung it in an old-fashioned wardrobe filled with other handsome garments: a blue suit, a brown suit, silk blouses, a white coat, a plaid raincoat. She put her hat on the shelf above and stepped out of her shoes.

"You ought to take that dress off, Cassy."

"I'm going to."

"It seems real chilly to-night," the older woman, who had a crocheted shawl about her shoulders and was huddling her feeble little claws in the wool, offered uncertainly.

"This house is an ice box," Cassy pronounced firmly.

"I think he has the furnace lighted, too," Mrs. Pringle murmured apologetically, glancing toward a small black iron grille in a corner of the floor.

"I doubt it!" Cassy said darkly.

"Seemed to me I've been smelling furnace gas all day," the other asserted mildly. "Was it a nice party, dearie?" she asked.

"It was lovely."

"How many girls were there, Cassy?"

"Eight—two tables of bridge. The old high-school crowd. 'Member Edith Whitman? There was a nice new one there—Margaret Paine."

"The San Mateo Paines?" Mrs. Pringle asked, interested.

"Oh, my, no! She works in the library. They live round here on San José Avenue, in one of those cottages near the school."

"She knew who you were?"

"I don't know."

"I guess she did," Mrs. Pringle said, in satisfaction. "Everyone out here knows our house."

She herself had been proud of it for the twenty-five years of her married life. She imagined that all San Francisco was proud of it.

"Was there a dress there cost what yours did?"

"No, I don't think there was. They were all taking it in."

"I guess they *were*," said Mrs. Pringle.

Cassy was in a worn old blue jersey now; she turned around at her bureau and looked at her mother under a bushy cloud of soft brushed hair that was lustrous, silky, coal black.

"I was the only one that wasn't bobbed," she observed dryly.

"I s'pose so. But you know how your father feels, dear."

"I ought to!" Cassy agreed, with a brief mirthless laugh.

"She's terribly pretty—she's prettier than I ever was," her mother thought, in a sort of astonishment. The girl's skin was a clear, almost transparent brown, and stained with scarlet on the cheek-bones; her big eyes flashed with liquid fire. Her lashes curled back with spectacular length and curve; she had the astonished aspect of a small child when she opened her eyes wide. When she tossed the cloud of silky hair backward and it fell in gypsy ringlets on her shoulders she looked foreign to her mother. Often, without knowing it, Cassy made her mother uneasy.

"I'm glad to have you go round with girls of your own age and have a good time," Mrs. Pringle said.

Cassy laughed shortly.

"Mamma, when you were young, did you ever go to dances?"

"No, I never went out much, Cassy. My folks didn't approve of it. And then I was only twenty-two when your father married me."

"I'll be twenty-two next month," Cassy murmured, struck.

"How'd you meet Papa?" she presently asked idly, as she massed and pinned the silky tumble of curls into place. She knew, vaguely.

"He came to consult my father—your grandfather was a doctor, you know. It was after Gert's mother had died; poor Papa, I remember how dark and sad he looked—left with little Gertrude."

Cassy, eyeing her mother in the mirror, felt an inward shudder. Papa always looked dark and sad. How any simple girl of twenty-two could ever have been drawn to Papa puzzled her.

"He was forty, Mamma?"

"Forty-one." Mrs. Pringle sighed for no obvious reason and with idle fingers pleated the ends of the frill that hung at her thin little neck. She still clung to the high ruched collars and lengthy skirts of the past generation.

She and Cassy went downstairs together, and the gloom, heaviness and dullness of the old mansion enveloped the girl like a tangible cloud. The wall papers were all old and dark and stained: they had been expensive once; they were rich in chocolate and gold and blood-red designs.

The floors were heavily carpeted to the very baseboards, where the thick folds were filled with dust, and the heads of the tacks showed. At the windows—there were seven great bay windows on the ground floor alone—draped fringed curtains of dark red or dark green rep were gathered back into deep folds by wide bands of braid and heavy tassels. The under curtains, of Nottingham lace, were also draped back, to show mouldy vistas of the garden evergreens, laurel and firs, shabby eucalyptus and bushy thick flowering plants, and the paths that were filmed with dank moss.

The Pringles used the old library, across the hall from the long stretch of the double parlors, as a sitting room. It was a square, uncompromising apartment, with an arched marble fireplace breaking the lines of the glass-doored bookcases. In the fireplace was a coal grate of a half-oval of steel bars, and from the mantel still depended a scalloped and embroidered cover of deep

magenta flannel. There was a clock representing Don Quixote and Sancho on the mantel, a bronze windmill rising between the two doughty little bronze riders. And on either side of the clock was a large Sèvres vase. One of the pair had been broken into a hundred pieces and was mended beautifully.

Leroy Pringle sat to-night, and always sat, in a certain comfortable plush armchair with fat, stuffed, fringed, and buttoned arms, and an embroidered tidy at the back. Beside him, on the long library table, a gas lamp with a Welsbach burner was lighted; he often said that he preferred this light to any in the world. Above the table two lights in a gasolier of four were lighted. They burned white, in round, smooth globes.

Gertrude, her father's daughter by an earlier marriage, was with him now, when Cassy and Mrs. Pringle came in. Gertrude was reading the second half of the evening paper under the somewhat diffused light across the table, while Mr. Pringle read the first half beneath the concentrated brilliance of the lamp. Neither stirred nor looked up at the entrance of the two women.

"Oh, dear!" Mrs. Pringle murmured, under her breath. She went to the fire, which was chewing sulkily on black coals, and began to stir it ineffectually. Cassy doubled her slimness and suppleness into a patent rocker that moved on a stationary base, and resting an elbow upon its upholstered arm and her glowing gypsy cheek upon a brown hand, stared vaguely into space.

"For pity's sakes!" Gertrude said suddenly. "I wonder if this Watson is any relation to the Napa Watsons!"

Her father looked off his paper tolerantly, and Mrs. Pringle turned from the fireplace in interest. But after a little talk, to which Cassy did not listen, they decided that the forger of the newspaper story could have had nothing to do with the Napa family, who were really nice people, if plain.

"You're a great one to get news out of the paper, Gertie," Mrs. Pringle said.

"Well, when you know everybody in a town, and all about them, and see right through their little pretensions . . ." Ger-

trude murmured, reading. "How was your party, Cassy?" she asked, after a moment.

"Oh, it was fine. We had lots of fun."

"Many there?"

"Only about eight."

"Oh, I thought it was going to be quite a party?"

"Well, it was. That is, when I met Jean, that day, and we first arranged it, she wanted an evening party," Cassy explained. "But then Papa wouldn't consider that, so I telephoned, and she said that we could have a little afternoon party instead."

"Exactly!" said her father, in obscure satisfaction. The women had no idea what he meant by it, but it was not the custom to question Papa. Cassy said to her sister in a low tone, "What happened to Folker?"

"I don't know," Gertrude returned with equal caution as she took off her rimless glasses and snapped them into place on her breast with a spring. "I imagine——" she was beginning with raised eyebrows, when Mr. Pringle said quickly:

"Here, here, here, no talking, please. I can't stand that whispering when I'm trying to read!"

Both girls fell silent, and Gertrude drew her glasses out on their black silk cord and turned to her paper again. Gertrude was thirty-five, a thin, intellectual-looking girl in a shiny, dark blue silk dress embroidered with a red, purple, yellow, and green Grecian pattern. Her stockings and slippers were impeccable, and her thin, well-brushed dark hair swept plainly off her face. Gertrude had the air of a person who is honest and frank with life; she spoke like a thinker, moderately but firmly. She read a great deal, thought out her costumes carefully, sometimes taking a week of shopping to a single gown, and lunched and went to lectures and concerts with women friends. Gertrude spoke French rather well and had been abroad for a year. Her real interest in life, however, was the Pringle genealogy; she regarded the family as the most important in the world.

Cassy had heard her say things that put the richest, the most distinguished of American families into second place; she had

often heard Gertrude's statement that the King and Queen of England had much less English blood in their veins than the Pringles had. Gertrude's mother had been a Vanderstart, which was almost as good as being a Pringle. Cassy was deeply impressed by the thought of her own lineage and of Gertie's even superior descent.

"Folker," said their father suddenly, dropping the hand that held his newspaper to the floor beside him, "Folker has been troublesome for some time."

The women came readily to attention, and Cassy murmured, "Yes, I know."

"You may have had some idea of it, Cassy," her father said unencouragingly, "but I cannot for the life of me see how you could have *known* it!"

Nobody paying any attention to this rebuke, he presently added, "I told him last week that I could not tolerate his attitude any longer, and this morning I let him go."

As he paused, Gertrude said intelligently:

"I think you were quite right."

"And shall you get another chauffeur, Papa?" Cassy asked interestedly.

He looked at her with discontent. The girl was all over the place, her eager voice like a blast, her hair ruffled over her ears, her long legs gathered up under her in anything but a dignified manner. Over his glasses Leroy Pringle regarded his youngest born with half-veiled eyes.

"Oh, no," he said dryly. "I shall drive myself about, of course, especially when I am in full dress, attending the theatre or a dinner. That run to Napa will be nothing for me with my bad wrist."

Cassy emitted a disrespectful giggle and subsided.

"I have—hem!" her father pursued, glancing at his paper again and clearing his throat. "I have already engaged another man. He drove me home to-night. He seems to be perfectly satisfactory."

"He looks real young," Mrs. Pringle offered timidly.

"Where did you see him, Lottie?"

"I was at the door when you came in, Papa, and I looked down at the drive."

"And you saw enough to make you decide that the man was too young? Ha!" said Leroy Pringle, with relish, "that's the woman of it, that's characteristic. Well," he added genially, stretching his legs, smiling at his womenkind, "let's hope that to-morrow Mamma doesn't object to the way his hair is curled, or because his coloring doesn't match the upholstery of the car!"

They all laughed perfunctorily as Hiota appeared neatly in the doorway to announce dinner.

Dinner. Four enormous chairs at an enormous oblong table, four lighted candles, a concession to Gertrude years ago, and two dim beads of gas above, a concession to Papa. Windows draped in dark rep, and a heavily embossed wall paper divided into panels. A wainscoting of Lincruster-Walton in dark brown, an oak sideboard with a display of silver pitchers and cake plates upon it.

Two china cabinets were in the room, each crowded to bursting with plates and glass. Gertrude's chocolate set, with tall gilded cups, and the Royal Worcester—sugar bowls, tureen, gravy-boats in oval saucers, curved fish-bone plates.

Hiota and Keno served the dinner. Little Japanese Keno, looking insignificant and flat-breasted in her American maid's uniform, was Hiota's wife. They brought the soup, the pale slices of bread, the cool roast and the roasted potatoes, the stewed tomatoes, the cold green artichokes rocking on their bases, the pumpkin pie.

"Are you going out to-night, Gertie?"

The silence was split, and rolled back into the dark corners of the room. Echoes drifted about; Cassy suppressed a rending yawn, and stirred uneasily in her chair.

"Olive is to telephone," Gertrude said briefly and lightly, like one alluding to a secret.

"The girls," began Cassy, her voice sounding loud and young, "were talking to-day about having one or two little cotillions this winter."

"What girls?" her father asked instantly, dropping his head to look over his glasses in her direction.

"The girls at the card party, Papa."

"I see," he said discontentedly.

"They thought that if they could put up—well, say ten dollars apiece—they're going to find out what it would cost——"

"It sounds to me as if you got that expression, 'put up,' from one of them!" Gertrude suggested good-naturedly. "It doesn't sound like one of us."

"I know. I wasn't thinking."

"I don't want you to have anything to do with it. I don't care what they do!—No, no more," said Leroy Pringle quietly, waving away the second passing of pie.

"Oh, Papa, why not?"

"Why, you don't mean to say you want to, Cassy?" Gertrude demanded, amused. Mrs. Pringle had the air of one who wishes to make herself invisible, one who is seeing, hearing, feeling, and thinking nothing.

"Well, yes, I do!" Cassy said defensively.

"No, no, no," her father said, not unkindly. He would not have to use any violence here; the thing was trivial. "You don't want to get into that sort of thing, Cassy. You'd regret it all your life!"

"Girls like that only want to get a hold on you, Cassy," her sister said warningly. "That's all they want. They want the *entrée* to this house, they want to tell everyone how well they know Cassy Pringle!"

"They're not your sort," said her father. "I didn't like this card-party invitation in the first place," he went on. "You remember that I said that I thought this little Miss Redding had considerable assurance to propose it. I knew exactly what it would lead to."

"Don't they live in those new apartments in the Du Barry?" Gertrude asked.

"Yes, up by the hospital on the hill."

"Well, exactly!" Gertrude responded triumphantly. "You can imagine what it would mean to a girl like that to get in here."

Cassy was impressed. She said, in a complaining undertone, "Well, I only thought it would be fun!" and thought no more about it.

After dinner, when Gertrude went off with Olive Shaw to a lecture about Women's Place under the Roman Empire, Cassy drifted about the library awhile, studying the familiar backs of the books: Dickens, Thackeray, Scott, Gibbon, Hume, Victor Hugo, and E. P. Roe, lines and lines and lines of moldy old volumes whose badly printed pages stuck together in thick wedges, when once in a dozen years some exploring hand opened them.

"You'll have to stop fidgeting, Cassy," said her father.

"Papa, would you mind if I walked down to the library to get a book?"

"Have Folker—hem!—have Wallace take you," her father amended.

"Oh, is his name Wallace?"

"Wallace, yes. Daniel Wallace."

"Nice name," Cassy observed.

"If your mother has no objection I don't mind your going down to the library," her father said.

"It's only a few blocks, Papa, and I'd really like the walk."

She was thinking of the brightness of Valencia Street and Mission Street, the candy stores crowded, the movies gushing streams of living human beings. More than once on decorous errands in the late afternoon or evening she had even slipped into a movie for a few intoxicating stolen minutes.

"I will not have you on the streets alone at night, Cassy. Ring that bell twice," directed her father.

Wallace appeared. He was not a particularly tall young man, but lithe and strong and squarely built. With his olive-green cap in his hand, his gaze respectfully fixed upon his employer, the chauffeur received his directions, took Cassy to the library, and waited for her there. They did not speak coming or going, except when Cassy said, "Thank you, Wallace," and Wallace cleared his throat and said, "Good-night, Miss Pringle."

She returned to the dark, smelly, impressive house feeling vaguely elated, her two new library books under her arm. Her father was still in the library, reading; a dull glow came out from the open door into the enormous vault of the hall, where the gas jet still burned with a rasping whine. Mrs. Pringle never had a chance to look at the paper until late in the evening; she was reading it now, her heavy eyes half closing as she glanced from menus to fashions, from stock quotations to social notes.

Sometimes she made a comment.

"Where does Hickson Gray get all his money, Papa? I see he's interested in the new bank."

"They owned most of that remade land over Richmond way."

"That so?"

And then after a long silence, during which the woman sat dreaming:

"His folks kept a roadhouse down the Penins'la, didn't they?"

"Certainly they did. That family doesn't amount to much!" Leroy Pringle would say.

Cassy knew just how it went; it was always the same. To-night she went noiselessly past the open door and ascended the stairway to her own room.

Seeing it as a part of the Pringle magnificence, she had always loved this room. In the same spirit, her father had approved of her interest in it, and there had been no lack of money with which to make it attractive when Cassy had graduated. The walls were papered in silver and pink stripes embellished with ribbons and roses, and the bay window was bare except for fresh ruffled chintz. The same chintz covered Cassy's enormous old-fashioned walnut bed, with its straight high back and millwork scrolls; there was a chintz flounce on her dressing table.

Other modern touches were the long-legged doll among the cushions on the bed, and the shelves filled with modern books; Shakespeare and Ibsen in slim leather, and red novels with gilded titles. Also Cassy had a pretty cherry desk, with a green vase full of shot, and a long green quill, a crystal and brass inkwell, and a sealing outfit with a tiny candlestick and tapers.

Her wardrobe was filled with pretty clothes, and her bureau with fine underwear; she had a fox skin and a blue evening coat trimmed with rabbit. Cassy wore this when she and Mamma and Papa and Gertrude went downtown to a lecture or to the symphony concerts.

She had silver slippers that she wore with her pale green silk with the silver roses. They stood in a neat line that began with pink felt bedroom slippers and ended with tennis shoes.

Everything was in perfect order. Cassy took care of her own room, except that Keno put away the laundry and swept the place thoroughly once a week—Friday mornings. And Hiota did the windows.

In this room, safely shut away from the rest of the household, Cassy became a different creature. Often, especially on a summer evening, when garden smells came in at her open window, and moonlight dripped through the dark trees, she would parade about the apartment clad only in a pink silk undergarment, her cloud of hair tumbling on her bare brown shoulders, her bare feet taking extravagant dancing steps.

But to-night, despite the black iron grating in the floor that connected with the furnace far below, the big place was chilly, and Cassy's masquerading had to be done in warm wraps. She took her evening coat out of the closet, dressed her hair in a high pyramid of silky curls, and lighted the dressing-table candles. Then she turned out the gas.

Reflected, with her bare throat and shoulders, and the revealed dip between her young breasts framed in rich blue velvet and white fur, she laughed at herself daringly. Her head was tipped sidewise, her white teeth flashed, her cheeks were glowing.

She was at the opera, talking to handsome men whose sleek heads were bent close to hers. They were in a box. That beautiful brunette woman in the box.

"Unfortunately for me, I don't believe one single word you're saying!"

But her laugh would take the sting out of the cruel words.

"No, truly, are you talking seriously?" she would ask, widen-

ing her eyes. She widened them in the mirror, and they shone like sapphires, with gray-blue glints.

Afterward she would say, with a little confusion, a little real feeling:

"I'm awfully sorry if I've made you unhappy. I think it's that I like everyone—I do like everyone so tremendously, and it looks like—it makes people think—men especially—that I'm falling in love, and I'm not! It's just that I'm in love with life."

She rose and bowed from the box to friends in the audience, smiling a little, not too much. She swept out toward a limousine. The night was black, rain was falling.

There was a beautiful red velvet drawing room—not double parlors, but one long clear room, with a few fat round velvet chairs, like the chairs in the Fairmont Hotel lobby, in a group at the far end. Lamplight, and men silhouetted against a great fireplace, and Cassy Pringle coming back from the opera. The furred coat was thrown aside, a lackey disappeared with it or something —anyway, she didn't have to bother with it. She was in trailing white satin, glittering with beads, her arms bare, her beautifully dressed hair bound with brilliants, a sheaf of roses in her arms . . .

"Who's sent me these darlings? Pink—my favorites . . ."

The red drawing room had been a favorite haunt with Cassy for some years, but He was new. He was one of the men at the fireplace, very tall and gentle and knightly in manner, but with no face. The face was there, of course, but she couldn't see it.

It was only in the last six months that He had come. Before that they had all just been Cassy's beaus, all adoring and hopeless and alike. But He was not like the others.

"Cassy, may I stay? Five minutes? I want so much to see you alone?"

Her artless eager look—she saw it in the mirror—would be innocently raised from the bantering talk with Reggie and Guy and Van and all the other men who looked like the cigarette advertisements.

"Oh? It sounds important, Tom."

So grave, so courteous and dignified, and yet so helpless under the slightest glance from her dark eyes.

"It *is* important."

"Then I think—you may stay for just five minutes."

After that everything grew rather vague, for no man had ever kissed Cassy, and yet it was imperative that Tom kiss her under these circumstances.

But immediately somehow they were all back in San Francisco again, and that pretty Pringle girl was engaged to a New York man. Cassy's interest, flagging a little over the kisses, feeling a little distaste, came suddenly to life for the selection of the trousseau. And the newspapers! The Leroy Pringles, one of our oldest families, for whom Pringle Boulevard and Pringle Memorial Park . . .

"I'm lucky," Cassy would muse, still looking at her own reflection in the fur and blue velvet. "Imagine being homely—imagine not having enough money and having to work—I wonder how girls *do* it."

She always got into bed and luxuriously turned the pages of a novel for half-an-hour as the very last thing. Her droplight burned steadily on the bedside stand, and sometimes the rain swished and dripped soothingly in the garden, and sometimes warm summer moonlight fumbled at her window sills.

To-night Cassy felt vaguely excited and read late. Both her books promised well, it seemed unusually fortunate to get two good ones at once. Now and then she gave a contented little wriggle as she read. To be warm and snug on a winter night with a good book . . .

And then besides, to have all those beautiful clothes, slippers and fox fur and everything, ready and waiting for the play to begin . . .

When she put out her light, however, the dream of the red salon always came back and carried her off to sleep.

"Here she is, back from the opera!"

"Who sent me these darling pink roses?"

And Tom, unhappy and grave, but always courteous and gentle.

"Cassy, may I stay five minutes?"

Sometimes, when she said, "It sounds serious," and Tom answered, "It's very serious," Cassy went on with a laughing, "Tom, you scare me!"

But often, by that time, she was asleep.

"I've had something to dress especially for, almost every day," she boasted to Gertrude on the following morning.

"Winter," said Gertrude; "it's always the season, you know."

"How do you mean 'the season'?"

"Well, the social season. The gay time."

"I had to dress for church, of course," Cassy capitulated, "and then I put on an apron to clean the canaries. Now Papa wants me to go hear Heifetz, and then, when I get home, Aunt Rose and Uncle Sim will be here, and I'll have to change again."

"Hospitality is a tradition in the family," Gertrude, getting into her lovely new gray ensemble, and about to depart for late service, suggested.

"But we don't entertain much now, Gert."

"Oh, no, because Papa's health isn't good, and Mamma hates it," the older sister said promptly. "But in the days when the Mission was a separate village they say the horses and carriages used to drive out here Sunday afternoons——"

"Gert, are we in society now?" Cassy asked after a pause.

Gertrude laughed lightly, not removing her attention from the slip that she was straightening over her slim hips.

"Imagine a Pringle asking that, Cassy!"

"I know. But—but, Gert," Cassy persisted, after an abashed interval, "we don't have our names in the papers all the time, like the Newtons and the Gaskells."

"My dear," said Gertrude definitely, "there isn't a door in San Francisco that isn't open to you. You could walk into places that never heard of the Newtons and the Gaskells. Why, when I ran into Mrs. Peter Colfax herself in Magnin's the other day," pursued Gertrude, who had since retailed this gratifying episode more than once to her stepmother and sister, but whose interest in it was as fresh as ever, "she was the most affectionate thing that you ever saw! 'Well, Gertrude Pringle!' she said. 'Why don't I ever see you? Why don't you come up and have lunch with me

some day?' *Mrs. Peter Colfax,*" Gertrude finished with quiet emphasis.

"I suppose they'd give their *eye teeth* to have her say that to them," Cassy mused, in satisfaction, thinking of the social aspirants who were not Pringles.

"You'd better believe they would!"

Gertrude, looking her prettiest and most intellectual, in her gray hat and gray gown and gray fur, her rimless glasses on their gold chain, departed for church, and Cassy drifted about the quiet Sunday house in a state of vague pleasure. Nothing to do except to look at the papers and sit about in her concert gown, dainty and neat, waiting for lunch and for three o'clock. Cassy heard church bells ringing and stood for awhile in the front library window, looking down from the shelter of the rep curtains at the street, below the garden bulkhead, and the well-dressed churchgoers moving on the sidewalk.

Then came lunch, and then Wallace brought the car around for the concert, a performance that always made her feel elegant and satisfied. She and Papa had subscription seats close to the stage, and a good many persons bowed to them as they went up the aisle.

Afterward Aunt Rose and Uncle Sim and Macallister Jessop came to dinner. Uncle Sim was Papa's partner in the old firm of "Pringle & Sons," and now there was a sign above the aged green sign that said "Pringle & Jessop, successors to." Macallister's father was the Jessop, but he had recently been ill a good deal, so Mac, who was a lawyer, represented him. Mac was thirty-two, a small dark man, whose mouth fascinated Cassy because it was upside down. His lower teeth stood in a firm row outside his upper, his lower lip was thin, and his upper full; Cassy, a child of ten, lying on a rug, had once seen his mouth wrong way up, as he bent down from behind her, and from that time on she never talked to Mac without trying to get the same effect.

Not that she talked to him very much. He was insufferably conceited because he was in a good law firm, and he always patronized Cassy. He made her feel young and raw.

Still, he was a male, and unappropriated, and Cassy always dressed with special care when he came to dine. He sat between her and Gertrude; Gertrude was very much at home with him. To-night Gertrude wore a white satin tube of a gown, heavy with sequins, and carried a white gauzy scarf about her rather lean shoulders. Cassy wore her blue taffeta with the silver roses and her silver slippers.

"We always dress for dinner," she had often said in high school, sometimes bewildering honest young fellow students who supposed that the alternative to dressing was undressing. But in truth the Pringles did not always dress for dinner unless there was company.

The dinner was dull, spaced with long silences in which the diners indulged only in laughing, nervous monosyllables.

"Do have more."

"Oh, no, thank you."

"Just a taste."

"Oh, I couldn't."

What talking was done was between the men and about the business. The women listened intelligently, as if absorbed with interest, but it was to save their faces.

"Well, how's the tennis?" Gertrude asked brightly of Macallister Jessop.

"No tennis now."

"Oh, that's true." She looked at him smilingly and said in a sudden confidential rush, "I'm wool-gathering to-night, I know! But I'm having the most fascinating adventure in a book, and I get ridiculously absorbed in a book—and especially in a French book, because they have the most—I don't know, the most delicate way of putting things."

"You're reading it in French?"

"Oh, my, yes!" said Gertrude, with a careless laugh. And immediately she lost her head completely, as Cassy had known she would, and ran on. "On the steamer coming back from Paris there was a most attractive young Frenchman who couldn't speak a word of English, and so the creature took it for granted that *I*

couldn't speak a word of French. Well, I'd known he *admired* me —but, I don't know!—you really can't tell what they're thinking about half the time . . ."

Cassy turned away. When Gertrude began to review her conquests, somehow it made her feel ashamed and uncomfortable and very sorry for Gertrude.

She could hear Mamma talking to Aunt Rose. They were talking about laundries. Aunt Rose had lost a nightgown; it wasn't the nightgown, it was the impudence she minded. Mamma said with meek complacence that it was an advantage, having the washing done at home. Aunt Rose answered sharply that none of the modern apartments made any allowance for that.

Uncle Sim was tasting Papa's port, smacking his lips, looking at his brother over the little glass.

"That's good port, Lee."

"I've had that port downstairs for twenty years," said Papa.

"Good port!" Uncle Sim repeated, writhing his lips.

"I've had that port twenty years. Let's see—you're about twenty-five, Cassy?"

"Papa, you're terrible! I'm not twenty-two!"

"Come, come, don't talk as if twenty-five was Methuselah!" Gertrude said challengingly. "I'm past twenty-five, and I'm not ashamed of it, and I'm having a better time now than I ever did!"

The gas rose suddenly to a clear high note; Hiota turned it down with the little tweezers on the long metal lighter. The room was very hot, and scented with gravy and onions and bread and cigar smoke. The air was thick, and the lights seemed battering at Cassy's eyes. She stirred restlessly and turned toward Macallister Jessop. He beamed at her through his strong glasses.

"Well," he said annoyingly, "how's the bridge?"

Cassy pretended to have completely forgotten a recent humiliating experience with Papa, Mac, and Gertrude at the card table.

"How did you know I play bridge?" she asked boldly.

"I know you don't!" Macallister said, with his eerie chuckle of laughter.

"You're a guest in my house," Cassy said patiently, her level gaze fixed beyond him, her color heightening.

"Yes, I know, I know!" he exclaimed in quick apology, with a quite sincere, yet unconcerned note in his voice that he might have used to a small child. "Well," he said, "what have you been doing with yourself this week?"

"Oh, not much," Cassy said, hating him. "I maintain a very equitable existence," she added.

His quick, delighted look flashed to her.

"You maintain a—*what?*"

"An equitable existence," Cassy persisted, betraying none of her inner uncertainties, yet conscious of a wish that she had not embarked into this particular sentence. Her face grew red.

"Oh," he said, looking at his ice cream. "And I hope you also maintain an equable one?" he asked pleasantly, glancing up.

Cassy was scarlet.

"Of course I mean an equable one!" she protested confusedly.

"Ha-ha-ha!" Macallister laughed, like a gnome. He returned to his dessert, and Cassy had a furious moment of wondering why a person with such bad manners went out to dinner at all. She could have bitten her tongue out for the slip; she would never use either word again without a pang of humiliation.

She did not speak to him again for a full minute, then she turned to him meaning to ask, "What are you reading?" for he liked to talk about books. But he stopped her at the third word.

"What are you going to do with yourself?" he asked abruptly, looking up.

"Do with myself?"

"Yes. Aren't you going to get into something?"

His tone offended her afresh, there was criticism in it; it was not for him to criticize the Pringles.

"I'm going to get into bed very shortly," Cassy answered frivolously, unimpressed.

"No, seriously!" he asked with a scowl.

"Get into what?" she asked in a voice of steel.

"Well, are you just going to drift along as Gertrude has,

hunting up thrilling details about great-aunts and Spode teacups?" Macallister asked, with his bantering smile.

Cassy was trembling inwardly with shock and rage. How dared he!

"Oh, Gertrude does a lot more than that!" she said in a tone that shook, and with an unconvincing laugh.

"A lot of this family talk—this pedigree talk—is pure bunk," the man said, with a confidential nod. "It's all right—it's all right," he conceded magnificently, "but it gets you nowhere. Now, it's nothing to me, Cassy," he hastened to interpolate, as she fixed him with a stern and hostile eye, "it's nothing to me! I'm engaged to Blanche Pryor——"

"You are?" Cassy interrupted, diverted in spite of herself.

"Well, yes, certainly!" he said casually.

"He *would* take it all as a matter of course!" Cassy said in bitter contempt, in her soul. "Getting a rich girl to marry him would be nothing to him, the conceited little rat!"

Aloud she said coldly, "Is it announced?"

"No, not until she and her mother get back from Europe." Again he dismissed it indifferently. "It's nothing to me what you or your sister do," he repeated. "But she ought to have married! Mulling round here with family trees and pedigrees——!"

"Gertrude could have married a dozen times if she wanted to," Cassy said quickly, as he paused to laugh.

"Now, why do you *talk* like that?" Macallister Jessop demanded pathetically. "Why do you let her *kid* you that way?"

The girl did not look at him or address him again for a full minute. Then she turned to him freezingly, with a phrase beginning, "Possibly to those who have no claim to lineage——"

But again he interrupted her.

"Sh-sh-sh! I'm trying to hear what they're saying up there," he muttered. A few minutes later the group broke, the four women going up to Mrs. Pringle's dismal big bedroom, where Aunt Rose's wraps lay on the bed and an unwilling fire was smoking.

Gertrude put on her plumed black hat and her black coat

with the rich black fox collar and was off to evening service, and Cassy listened to her mother and aunt discussing servants for awhile and then yawned and bade them good-night, just as the clock was striking nine.

"Cassy," said her mother then, suddenly, "Papa told me, and I forgot. Will you run down to the garage and tell Wallace that we want him to take Mr. and Mrs. Pringle home? Uncle Sim's car . . ."

Against Aunt Rose's perfunctory murmur of taxis Cassy departed. She descended the back stairway, crossed an odorous dark lower hall, and pushed the swinging door into the pantry.

"Oh, Wallace!" she said, with a movement of retreat. For the young chauffeur was dining there; a plateful of chicken and vegetables was before him, he had a buttered roll doubled in his hand as he looked up, and his cup of coffee was steaming black beside him. Above his head a gas jet wavered with the motion of the door. The pantry's white walls and shelves held the light; it was very bright and hot.

"That's all right!" Wallace responded with an eager little nervous laugh to her tone of apology. He had half risen as she entered, but as Cassy immediately sat down opposite him at the table he also sat down again.

He wore the breeches and puttees that were the badge of his profession, but his costume to-night was completed by a soft-collared white shirt open at the throat; his strong, round, hard throat showed, and his fair hair, with a deep rich shine in it, was a little tumbled. The wisdom of his sophisticated eyes impressed Cassy, he was quite unruffled by this encounter, he did not seem conscious of his disordered hair or informal dress.

"Mamma wanted me to ask you if you'll take my uncle and aunt home," Cassy explained, a little breathless.

"Your father told me," Wallace said, with a nod. "Sure, sure I will!"

"Oh, did he? Oh, I didn't know that. Mamma was afraid you didn't know."

"Yep. Your father told me." They looked at each other smil-

ingly, a little at a loss. Then he picked up his coffee cup and drank off half its contents and nodded to her again, showing, this time, a flash of smile. "I was certainly hungry!" he said, with a deep breath.

Cassy was always at home with the servants, and she liked friendly, boyish Wallace. She smiled back maternally and, resting her elbows on the table, looked, in her friendly fashion, straight into his eyes.

"Where were you, to be so late?" she asked.

"After I brought you home from the concert I went over to Oakland," Wallace explained. "To see—somebody off, on a train."

"Oh, Wallace, you have a girl in Oakland!"

"You said something. Only she's seventy-four years old today."

"Your mother?"

"My grandmother."

"And where's she going?"

"Back to New York. She was here visiting her niece."

"And is your mother living, Wallace?" Cassy pursued, her shining dark eyes fixed interestedly upon his face.

"No. Both Mother and Father died when we were kids. There are four of us."

"And are you the eldest?"—"Father dead, and Wallace supporting them all," was running through her head. But his answer dispelled the dream.

"I'm the youngest. My older brother is married, and he runs the business. One of my sisters is married and lives in New Jersey, and the other teaches school."

"Runs what business?"

"The old man's business—my father's business."

"What business is it?" she persisted with dancing eyes. Her rounded, firm brown chin was still cupped in her brown hands, her elbows resting on the table; the bright light shone down upon her piled silky black curls and the apricot stain in her clear brown cheeks.

"Printing. He has a press in New York," Wallace explained.

"Oh? And didn't you want to go into that business?"

"I did for awhile. And then a fellow and I thought we'd buy a plane and start a cross-continental express. I put three thousand dollars into that, and she made two trial trips before she crashed," the man said.

"Three thousand dollars!"

"Sure. And five hundred of it was borrowed from my brother. That's what gripes him."

"And then you decided to be a chauffeur?"

"Yep. I know all about cars, and it's easy money for me."

"And how long have you been doing it?"

"Driving?" He grinned. "Since yesterday morning," he said. "I went to an agency, and they sent me here, and I went downtown and got a—what you call it—a livery, and came up and started in."

"Oh, Wallace! Then you aren't a chauffeur at all!"

"I guess I'm as much that as anything."

"Well, but you——" She had heard Gertrude, at the Settlement House, spurring on the unambitious; she took something of Gertrude's encouraging tone. "But there's no particular future in this, Wallace," she reminded him.

"Oh, I won't stay with this!" he agreed easily, finishing his meal, wiping his strong, pleasant mouth with his napkin. "A fellow I know wants me to go into a garage with him out here on Valencia Street," he said. "I might do that."

She continued to regard him with fascinated eyes, and he looked back at her, unsmiling. Their glances clung, arrested.

And suddenly it was as if some new element had entered the bright, hot, food-scented pantry and had changed the whole mental and spiritual atmosphere between the girl and man who sat there. Both began to breathe a little more quickly, and neither moved by so much as a flickering eyelash, except that Cassy's young breast rose—rose—and her lips faintly parted, and Wallace's hand, which had been stretched toward his water glass, fell slowly to the table.

The gas sang softly, and a motor car honked in the distant street. Cassy softly expelled a long breath, and her delicate brown young breast, framed in the blue taffeta and silver roses, moved again. Presently, in a silence as tense as a drawn bowstring, both smiled.

Then the color rushed into her face, and she laughed in confusion and pleasure. Immediately she was on her feet, and with one glowing nod to him she vanished through the swinging door and was back in the dark, odorous, chilly hallways of the main house. Wallace remained for some minutes, looking at the door through which she had vanished, an odd, puzzled expression on his face.

He roused himself suddenly with an abrupt laugh, and, gathering up his plates and cutlery expertly, piled them all in the sink and began to efface all the signs of his meal. While he was doing it he presently stopped again and stood staring into space, lost in a brown study. And this moment also ended with a brief laugh.

Cassy, ashamed, excited, flattered, scared, went upstairs on wings, and whirled into her room, and shut the door behind her. As she did so she saw herself in the mirror across the room, a slender brown creature with midnight hair piled above her blazing eyes and scarlet cheeks, with the petals of the blue taffeta and silver gown settling about her.

She did not think of Wallace, she thought of everything else; she put her gown away carefully and snapped the trees into her slippers, and pinned her hair severely back, to wash her face with all her old childhood thoroughness. Then she brushed the hair into a cloud, and tossed it about like an oriflamme of smoke, and did a sort of dance in her pale pink silk pajamas, with the peaches and peach leaves stencilled on them. After that she said her prayers, raised a window, extinguished lights, put her book beside her bed, and opened the bed neatly: the chintz cover laid over the high baseboard, one pillow flat on top of the other, and the linen sheet and fluffy blanket turned down in a long trim fold.

"The most delicate linens and laces . . ." her thoughts ran excitedly. "A mass of luxurious pillows couching her slender young beauty . . ."

Perfume. She had several bottles of it. Gertrude was always spending ten dollars, and fourteen, and even twenty, for little flasks of scent that she, afterward, didn't like at all. She gave them to Cassy when this happened, and Cassy used any and all kinds indifferently.

Cassy splashed herself with perfume and looked about the big, dim, orderly room. Nothing else to do; there would be no masquerading in the red velvet salon to-night. Somehow she was not in the mood for the familiar pretense.

With a laugh that rang oddly in the quiet place, she sprang into bed and opened her book at random, conscious, even while she read, of her own thrilling young body, of her own beauty and sweetness, of new values, new potentialities, in her familiar self.

Once she sat up, bending sideways a little, to catch a glimpse of herself in the distant mirror. Gypsy curls, gypsy eyes, scarlet color in lean brown gypsy cheeks; Cassy laughed again exultantly, as she settled back in bed.

She read faster and faster, crowding the little scene in the pantry into the background. Ridiculous! The chauffeur, whose sister was a school teacher and whose brother had a small printing press somewhere . . .

A violent uproar broke out in the shrubbery outside of the back passage just under her window. The motor engine—Aunt Rose and Uncle Sim were going. Cassy lay still, her heart beating fast. She heard Macallister Jessop saying, "Good-night."

"Will you want one of the jump seats, sir?" That was Wallace's voice, with the laugh in it.

"Oh, no—I'll sit . . ." A jumble of voices. Good-nights, and thanks for the nice dinner . . .

The noise died away in a long stream of engine breaths and the squeak of brakes as the car turned into the quiet street. Silence, black and complete, took possession of the Pringle house and of the world.

Well, it was no use. Cassy had to remember it. Not that he had said so much, but he had said it in such a funny way, he had had such a queer look . . .

She knew what it was. It was the way men talked to girls. All sorts of persons were always talking to each other—girls and their mothers and teachers, and girls with persons they liked and didn't like. But this was the way a young man talked to a girl —and how thrilling it was! What fun it was!

Cassy had never felt so pleasant an exhilaration in her life before. She thought of Dan's expression, laughing and sure of himself, and yet respectful, too, and she remembered his words, downstairs, just now, in the dark.

"Will you want one of the jump seats, sir?"

He was her father's chauffeur. The words meant nothing, the fact meant nothing. Everything else had faded away into the un-

important background, except the blazing truth that she was a woman and Dan Wallace a man.

His words, and the memory of his look as he said them, faded into utter dullness and meaninglessness, when the bright clear winter morning broke, and Cassy excluded them from her thoughts all day. But the next night she remembered them again, and they seemed to make the red salon turn pale, and killed the familiar play for the time being.

On Wednesday, after three days of a bewilderment of spirit arising from the conflict between cloud by day and fire by night, Cassy had occasion, or rather made the occasion, to go out to the garage and tell Wallace that she and Mamma were going to a lecture at the Women's Club to-night.

Wallace was busy with a hose, and oils, and various rags and chamois skins; he was smoking a cigarette, his clothing was wet and dirty.

"O. K.," he said cheerfully, with an alert, friendly look.

It was all horribly commonplace. The old stables of the Pringle place, disused for years, still had a certain romantic beauty and fitness about them. But the garage, made of corrugated iron painted white, was new, and hideous with cans of oil, tools, glaring great windows staring starkly on the alley that ran at the back of the yard. Its wide doorways were in themselves an offence; there was nothing cosy or intimate about the garage.

"I was going off to-night, but I can go to-morrow night just as well; I'll fix it with your father," Wallace said, with his eager, easy smile, dropping his cigarette stub into a bucket that hissed, and picking up an oily rag.

Why, he was just a servant, complaining of his days off, like any other servant! Cassy held her head high, and her cheeks burned with shame as she walked back to the house.

And that night she had neither the red salon nor the memory of the pantry to console her.

The moment marked a painful change in her; she took a step forward into womanhood that could never be retraced.

There was no immediate evidence of change; she was quite

unconscious of it herself. She only knew that life had become insufferably dull and that she was sick of it.

In the middle of some familiar task that had always seemed sufficiently amusing to her, she would be suddenly seized with a vast, angry impatience, and the piano practise, the French lesson, the decorous attendance at lectures or dutiful conversation with Gertrude's charming women friends, would infuriate her. She made irritable answers that puzzled her mother and sister; it was almost as if the youngest Pringle had moments in which she failed to appreciate her position, her wealth, and her advantages.

When charming Miss Shaw, who was practically the head of the Girls' Junior Self-Making Club, congratulated Cassy on the decorations at Gertrude's lunch party, Cassy said bitterly, "Oh, yes, I'm not yet twenty-two, and I can fix chrysanthemums wonderfully!" in a way that shocked the visitor.

"Trudy, dear," Olive Shaw said later, "it was only that I wondered what poor I had done to make the little sister so cross. *That* was all I minded!"

"Oh, what's the difference, anyway?" Cassy would say loudly, to the amazed little French teacher. "What's the difference, anyway?" she would ask herself, walking rapidly down the street, or musing in the library alcoves, desperate tears in her eyes.

The days went on, the weeks and months went on. Everything was just as it had always been, and yet everything was completely, even shockingly, different. Cassy moved through her life like a creature in a troubled dream. The passing of time distressed and frightened her for the first time. She had never been conscious of time before.

Her clothes ceased to interest her; the very sight of them chilled her. Of what use were clothes? Clothes were not living! Cassy's twenty-second birthday was a nightmare. The years were racing by, marked by checks from Papa, stockings from Mamma, and books—Ruskin and Pater—from Gertrude. Soon she would be thirty-five and Gertrude forty-eight, and everything at home would be just the same.

She got up every morning at eight and breakfasted with her

father at quarter to nine. The dining room was dark on the winter mornings, and the gas always lighted. Keno brought in cups of coffee and toast and eggs; nothing was very hot or very cool, nothing either good or bad. Cassy seized whatever section of the newspaper her father was not reading, and read it indifferently. She always read the society notes sooner or later; teas, luncheons and dinners were being given for the season's débutantes every day, and dances twice a week. They went to Pebble Beach, these fortunate girls, and to the Burlingame Club; they watched polo and played golf.

Cassy had never cared what they did before. Now she suffered acutely over them; most of them were younger than she was.

After Papa went, she and Mamma and Gertrude usually sat about the table for a long time, sometimes for an hour. They talked somewhat of the plans for the day, but often of the glories of the family. When Mamma fell into a vein of reminiscence that included old days—the Pringle balls, the beautiful span of bay horses old Colonel Pringle used to drive, the family jewels and the Tonetti portraits, Cassy and Gertrude listened, absorbed. Mamma remembered much more than that, too.

She could pierce all the pretenses and affectations of the thousands of social pretenders who had uprisen since. It made her laugh to hear that the Marshalls had a ballroom, or the Wicksons were sending their girls to Europe. Marshalls and Wicksons indeed!

"Joe Marshall's mother——"

"J. Lyon Marshall, please, Mamma."

"Well, J. Lyon Marshall, then!—did you ever hear anything like that!—J. Lyon Marshall's mother had a little millinery store, out here on Capp Street . . ."

Cassy liked the pictures of old days of San Francisco best, when every arriving sailing vessel from around the Horn brought silks and cottons and calicoes that were advertised in the morning newspapers in lots and eagerly inspected by the fashionable women who went down to the docks and promenaded to and fro, shopping, chaffering, and gossiping with the merchants. Her

grandfather had had flowing side chops and had always worn a silk hat and a frock coat in the afternoons; his picture had been down in the old Stock Exchange on Montgomery Street, until the big fire.

The magnificent Colonel Pringle had been nothing to Mamma, whose own mother had been an obscure little girl in these stirring days, but Mamma loved to tell the story of the old pioneer millionaire seizing upon a bolt of red silk, and one of blue, and leaving the wharf with the rich fabrics loosening about his shoulders, while he shouted, "Charge 'em to me, Cap! Dammit, we have got to give these wimmin clothing to take off their backs!"

After breakfast Mamma went into the kitchen for interminable talks with Hiota about cold potatoes and what was left of the soup, and the girls wandered upstairs to make their beds, straighten their rooms, and stand in their doorways, idly talking.

The dreary, gloomy unreal day would begin to glide by; the big, elegant, dismal rooms were empty, darkened, filled with strange creakings and echoes.

Cassy wrote letters and sealed them elaborately with hot sweet-scented wax. She practised sometimes, and on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays Mademoiselle came, and they had an hour of French, on the end of the dining-room table. When Keno let a door slam, remotely upstairs, in the region of the linen closet and storeroom, the noise boomed dully through the house like a cannon shot.

In the afternoon both girls went out. They almost always went in the car; Gertrude would be dropped at the club, Cassy at the library, or downtown among the shops. She had plenty of money, she could buy all the stockings and handkerchiefs she wanted.

Sometimes Mamma went too, and they paid calls. They sat in strange orderly parlors, and noiseless maids let up window shades to admit a rift of afternoon light, and silk-clad, quiet-voiced ladies came downstairs and were delighted to see Mrs. Pringle and Cassy. If there were young girls in the family, they sometimes came in, and asked Cassy huskily if she liked the Holloways. But

Cassy did not belong to the Holloway Cotillion Club; Papa objected strongly to it.

Papa said that it had been all right, twenty years ago. But now it was so filled with *parvenus, nouveaux riches,* and social upstarts generally that Papa wouldn't consider it. Gertrude had been to two of the Holloways years ago and remembered their glories still. But Cassy was quite content to have nothing to do with anything so vulgar as they were now.

Not that she ever said this. She only observed mildly that, no, she didn't belong.

She and Gertrude often went to teas, the nicest in the city. They liked the big warm handsome houses filled with flowers and dim lights and chattering persons; they always met a great many persons they knew and were confirmed once again in a sense of social importance. Coming out from a tea, wearing her handsomest clothes, with perhaps a bunch of sweet, dying violets pinned to her fox fur, Cassy would feel happy. It was fun to see the big limousine wheeling up to the door for the Misses Pringle, fun to say good-bye in a flutter of protests and invitations.

"Look here—Catherine! Don't you want a card for Dorothy's dance next month?"

"Oh, thanks so much, Mrs. Scott. But Papa being such a nervous invalid, you know, Mamma feels that Cassy had much better . . ."

Thus Gertrude, at great length, in the hallways. But in the car she would laugh and say sardonically:

"Dorothy's dance! Wouldn't she *like* to have you on intimate terms with Dorothy!"

"I don't think we ought to go to their houses, Gert, if we don't really like them," Cassy said once with compunction.

"Oh, my dear, you have to be decent to them, you can't hurt their feelings," said Gert carelessly. So that was that.

Returning to the Howard Street house, the Pringle girls would be at once enveloped in its atmosphere of gloom, its musty odors, its elegant slow decay. The dim gas beads would welcome them, the faint light from the library, the smell of unwilling coal fires.

Keno would flap the tablecloth over the protecting felt on the big table, Hiota close upstairs doors with a distant boom.

Gertrude would go to her room, Cassy to hers. Silence would reign everywhere, a silence underscored rather than broken by the hissing of gas flames, the humming of pipes in the walls when anyone turned on a water faucet, and Papa's steady voice in his room, punctuated by the faint murmurs of Mamma's replies.

"Bar-bar-bar-bar! And bar-bar-bar-bar?" This would be quick and definite. Mamma would answer apologetically, "A-ger-ger-ger, Lee. A-ger-ger-ger."

Quarter to six. And dinner was at seven. Cassy might drift aimlessly downstairs to the piano, open it without sound, and begin a song of Mendelssohn's. But sometimes, if she did, her mother's voice instantly descended to her through the great airy vault of the stairways.

"No, no, Cassy! Papa's lying down."

Papa's headaches, his fatigue, and his moods pretty well filled the remainder of the evening for the women of the family. They crept about cautiously, trying to ascertain what would please Papa.

Conversation in the library was forbidden if Papa was in his fringed and buttoned chair under the Welsbach light. The library, he always said, was a place for *quiet*. If he was in one of his dark moods at dinner, even Gertrude could not win him out of it.

"Dolly stuffed with sawdust to-night, Papa?"

He would look at her coldly over his glasses, lowering the sallow, mustached face.

"I don't know what you mean by that, my dear."

And petrified silence would hold the table once more.

When Macallister Jessop and Blanche Pryor were to be married, early in March, Cassy was thrilled by being asked to be bridesmaid. But her father refused to entertain the idea for a moment.

"It's a pure business courtesy," he said witheringly, "and I won't have you forming an intimacy in that direction."

"But, Papa, I've known Blanche all my life! We were in school together."

"And is the idea to cultivate all the girls who happened to be in school when you were there?"

"No, of course not! But I'd love to be a bridesmaid, sitting at the bride's table and talking about clothes and everything!"

"Well," said her father coolly, "some time, perhaps. But not this time!"

"I'm twenty-two!" Cassy muttered rebelliously.

"I'm aware of it. What has that got to do with it?"

"Well, only—well, only——" Cassy didn't know what was the matter with her, her throat was thickening, she was going to cry. Up to this point she had felt entirely indifferent to Blanche's invitation, now suddenly she was passionately concerned about it. "Well, only, when *am* I going to begin doing things and going places?" she blurted out desperately.

Gertrude looked shocked, and Mamma ready to faint. Even Papa's calm was a little shaken, and he looked dashed.

"Doing what things? Going what places?" he asked measuredly, in a dead silence.

"Well—I never meet anyone here—I never *will* meet any men here——" This was exactly what Cassy had not meant to say. She stopped abruptly, horrified at her own daring.

Her father studied her over his glasses for a full, dreadful minute. Then he returned quietly to his book.

"When the time comes there won't be any trouble about that," he said. "Any young man of whom I approve will be made most welcome in my home."

This sort of thing was characteristic of the home dinner table and of the long dreamy evenings in the library, and Cassy had never seen anything amiss in it before. The Pringles had always had delightful manners among themselves: the girls were affectionate and loyal with Mamma, merry and confidential together, and considerate and admiring and arch with Papa.

But this spring everything was changed, for Cassy at least. Her disillusionment about the family did not come gradually:

suddenly, violently, completely, she hated them all. She hated Mamma, who had been a doormat for Papa all her life, and she despised Gertrude, a simpering, useless old maid, discussing upside-down cake with Hiota, and fixing her rimless glasses carefully on her nose to read an encyclopædia article about Sir Geoffrey Pringle. As for Papa, he was the root and cause of everything dreary and hopeless about her life, and Cassy could only get through these spring days at all by imagining Papa's sudden death, and his funeral in the double parlors.

March winds rioted over the Mission and blew chaff and papers along the streets, and the stocky old lilac trees bloomed out by the garage. Cassy looked exquisite at Blanche's wedding, and a boy named Porter Mott asked her if he could come to see her. But he had only two days left before he must depart for an Eastern college, and somehow, even in the midst of the wedding gayety and confidence, Cassy could not quite summon up enough courage to ask him to dine at her home.

Papa hated impromptu hospitalities and might be cranky, and anyway, Cassy could not somehow see herself and young Mott stranded in the great front parlor, making conversation, while Mamma or Gertrude flitted casually in and out, protecting her.

So that opportunity passed. And the dreaming, idle days began their wheeling flight again.

One night there was a warm discussion at the dinner table about the Library Extension lecture on "The Days of the Terror." Gertrude could not go because there was a Guild meeting, Papa was stricken with one of his neuralgic headaches and meant to collapse into bed right after his usual four-course dinner, and Mamma would of course have to stay with Papa. Cassy, bored and ungracious, said that she didn't care a rap about the old history course.

But this fired her father's ready antagonism, and he observed acidly that he did care about it; it was an educational opportunity that some of the most brilliant persons in town were only too thankful . . .

There was a great deal of this, and then it was decided that

Mamma should telephone the Butlers, and Cassy should be put into their care for the evening. It was suddenly remembered that the Butlers had no telephone, but Cassy could drive there with Wallace, and Wallace could run up their steps and see if they would go.

This arrangement being approved, Cassy descended at quarter to eight to the side door, and to Wallace, in the big car.

Chapter IV

GERTRUDE and her mother and father were all awake, of course, when she returned at quarter to eleven. Gertrude emerged from her doorway in her gray and blue silk wrapper, and Mamma invited Cassy into her own dreary, bare room, to regale poor convalescent Papa, who was sitting up in bed reading, with a report of the lecture.

"The Butlers weren't there, Papa. They're over in Oakland with Mrs. Butler's father. He's dying."

"I remember now," said Leroy Pringle, nodding thoughtfully.

"Heavens! I hate the idea of your running up their steps and talking to servants in an empty house!" Gertrude exclaimed anxiously.

"I didn't, Gert. Wallace did."

"That was right. But then why didn't you come straight back, dear?"

"You hadn't told me to, Papa."

Her round, innocent eyes moved from face to face.

"Did you go to the lecture all alone, you little runaway?" Gertrude demanded proudly and fondly.

Cassy nodded solemnly, and Gertrude laughed aloud.

"That was all right. Didn't you find it interesting?" her father pursued.

"Oh, very, Papa! The best of the series. It was all about the revolution being a revolution in a revolution," Cassy observed enthusiastically.

"Exactly," he said.

Cassy glanced about the gloomy, heavy room, dull in gaslight, and smelled the familiar smells of carbolic and dust and rot.

"Is your headache better, Papa?"

"Not much. Well, I'm glad you didn't miss your lecture, my dear. It looks as if Papa knows best sometimes, eh?"

"I should say so!" Cassy conceded with a laugh.

And that night there was a long masquerade before the mirror, with all the old arch glances, and the regal exits and entrances

more impressive than ever before. The red velvet salon was peopled again, and the beautiful Miss Pringle returned once more from the opera with her arms full of roses.

"Who sent me these darlings? My favorites . . ."

And Tom was there, of course, only his name was Dan, now, and when she came to Dan Cassy felt her heart stop, and the palms of her hands grow wet, and the roof of her mouth dry. She sat staring into the mirror, but of the reflected slim brown gypsy girl therein she saw nothing. Her lips were faintly parted, her eyes far away, her breath moving fitfully through her nostrils.

When, dazed and quiet, she presently roused herself, it was to move through the customary preparations for the night like a sleepwalker. She got into bed and, from long custom, opened her book.

But she could not read a word. She lay there thinking—thinking—and the rose color burned in her brown cheeks, and her eyes were filled with spells.

Cassy threw her books to the floor, turned off her light, and covered her face with her hands in the dark. A deep noiseless laugh of exultation and sheer happiness rose within her being, she wriggled from head to foot, caught a long breath, and lay still, staring upward into the darkness.

The spring night went by; Cassy was unconscious of time. She was happily, comfortably lying, wide awake, when a struggling wet dawn whipped young pear leaves against her high windows.

That morning her mother heard her singing while she made her bed, and she and Gertrude decided thankfully that whatever had been the matter Cassy was cured; the child was herself again. Cassy practised thoroughly, she whistled softly over her French lesson. She talked about books, about going out to visit the Settlement House, and said that she was going to have a riding horse at Napa this summer and ride again.

At noon there was some talk about orders for Wallace, and Cassy flashed out to the garage with all her old vivacity to see if he was there. When she came back she said that the reason that

he had not answered his bell was that he was in the old harness room, mending an engine or something.

"You oughter have worn a sweater, out in all that rain, Cassy," her mother protested. For her cheeks were spattered and glowing, and her black rings of hair diamonded with the soft spring rain.

"Oh, no, he had a fire, Mamma! It was as warm as toast out there."

"Are you coming to the Rummage Sale, Cassy?"

"Oh, I don't think so, to-day! I thought I would to-morrow. I want to see *Seventh Heaven,* and it stops to-night."

"Well, then, drop me at the Hall, and ask Wallace—— Mamma, are you going out?"

"I thought I might go see your Aunt Rose—she's had an impacted tooth—but I'll walk, Gertie, because Papa wants the car to call for him sharp at four, and I'll have to be home before that."

"No, you won't walk, either! Why should you? Get your hat on now, Mamma, and we'll drop you at Uncle Sim's first of all. Then Cassy can drop me . . ."

It was so easy! Cassy, snuggling up against Dan's shoulder in the darkness of the movie an hour later, laughed triumphantly.

"Have any trouble last night?"

"No. That revolution within a revolution stuff that I got at the library went over beautifully!"

"There'll be a revolution within a revolution when Papa gets onto this, believe you me," Dan Wallace said seriously. Cassy, delicious and soft and gay, resting luxuriously against his big shoulder, laughed again in the dark.

The lights went up, and they were three seats apart: a pretty girl with curly dark hair and a brown gypsy face, and a handsome young chauffeur, both absorbed only in the picture. Then the lights were down again, and Cassy went back against his shoulder, and her satin-smooth, loving little hand was tight in his big one.

"Listen, Cassy, I hope I'm not getting you into anything?"

"You're not getting me into anything I don't want to get into! I'm of age."

"Yes, I know. But you're nothing but a kid, just the same!"

Her hot, confidential, happy little whisper was close to his ear.

"Dan, I'm so happy!"

She felt the arm that he had stretched along the back of her chair tighten on her shoulders.

"It's not a patch on what you're going to be!"

"Oh, I know that!" She knew no misgivings to-day. It was some days later that she said thoughtfully, "I suppose Papa will cut me off without a penny!"

"Leave it to Papa!" Dan agreed with an undisturbed grin.

"I don't care!" Cassy said.

"I don't know why you should. If I get a break, I'll make you twice the money your father's got."

"But we'll be poor for a little while at first, Dan?" she coaxed. "I want so much to have a tiny place, all sunshiny, and to have to cook your puddings!"

"Don't worry," Dan assured her dryly, "you'll be poor all right."

The girl laughed contentedly.

"It'll be funny to be poor!"

"Not so darned funny," Dan said.

"I can't imagine just what it would feel like," Cassy mused. "It must feel rather—tight," she decided.

The word puzzled him.

"Tight?"

"Well—crowded. I mean," Cassy explained, "to have just so much money in your purse—and no more."

"It seems funny to me that you never were that way," Dan said simply.

Cassy mused awhile without comment before saying in sudden animation:

"What matters to me—what matters terribly—is not missing all the rest—falling in love, and marrying, and being poor! Money can't buy that, you know!"

"It's a funny way to look at it," Dan said, struck and a little puzzled. "I suppose you're sure that we can make a go of this?" he asked presently, with a long sigh.

"Oh, but hasn't everybody—always?" she countered brightly, almost surprisedly.

"Everybody always what?"

"Men and women, marrying on nothing, and turning out rich and successful," she elucidated confidently.

"Sometimes they go down instead of up," he reminded her dubiously.

"Not our kind!" she said, shaking her head.

Presently Dan said, in a rather husky low tone, "I'll give you more than your father ever gave you, money or no money!"

"You have already!" Cassy assured him promptly.

"Dan," she presently began seriously, "you've been crazy about lots of girls, haven't you?"

"Not the way I am now," Dan answered promptly.

They had parked the car down in the long line of cars on the Cliff House sands; they were in the driver's seat together, looking at the ocean. The spring day was so hot that there were bathers in the surf; the sun shone steadily, there was no cloud in the great blue stretch of the sky above the Pacific.

Cassy stirred against his shoulder to look keenly into his face and settled down contentedly again.

"Tell me about them!" she directed calmly. Dan laughed.

"There's darned little to tell. You don't believe that now, but it's true! No," he went on, considering, "I'd meet some girl, and get a crush on her, and rush her for awhile." An abashed, simple sort of smile that she already knew and loved came over his face. "I'd sort of—play round with them!" he admitted artlessly.

"But not like this?"

"My God, no! I never knew anyone in the world ever felt like this."

"Nor I, either," Cassy confessed gravely.

"I never knew there was anyone in the world like you, Cassy," the man said humbly. "You're so beautiful to begin with, and—

I don't know, so brown and cute and loving. And then you're so darned smart—you're a million times smarter than I am! To risk a fight with your family just for a washout like me!"

"You've done more for me already than anyone else I ever knew, Dan. I'm alive," Cassy said.

"Oh, Cassy!" he burst out suddenly, "let's always remember this afternoon, when everything was so warm and—and beautiful, and when you and I stopped out here and talked like this! Let's always love each other no matter what happens. Let's be the kind of people they talk about, just crazy about each other!"

"That's what I want to be, Dan," she said, rather low, swallowing, and blinking her eyes. "I'm not afraid of being poor!"

"You won't have to be poor. I've not had anything to work for, up to now," Dan said, "but, by God, I'll work for my wife!"

"You don't have to," she said, with a dreamy upward glance and a smile.

"Those places in St. Francis Wood," Dan went on valiantly. "I'll buy you the pick of them on our fifth wedding anniversary."

"The gray and white one with the green blinds, then."

"Dan," she asked suddenly, out of a silence, "do you suppose other people engaged to be married are as happy as we are?"

"Darned if I know!" he answered ingenuously. "I was thinking that last night. I was wondering if everyone who gets engaged—— I knew," he broke off to say with the honest, puzzled air she so loved, "I knew it would be thrilling and all that, but it's —different. I can't think what else I can ever think about but you!"

And at this Cassy laughed deliciously.

"I'll always love you, Dan, as long as I live! I know it, because I know myself. There's never been anything in my life except you, never anyone who wanted to kiss me and be kind to me!"

"Well, it looks as if a good many arrears were going to be made up," he said dryly.

The thought shook Cassy, and she was still for a long while. "Dan, isn't it funny that as soon as you begin to think about getting married you have to think, 'What will we live on?' "

"I was thinking that, too."

"Well, Dan, what *will* we live on?"

"I'm getting a hundred a month and found," he said.

"And *found?*"

"Yep. Board and room. But we mustn't spill the beans until I'm doing a lot better than that."

"But I don't want you to do a lot better than that if it means going away, Dan."

"I wouldn't go far." His puzzled, little-boy look. "I wouldn't go far from *you*. I'd get a job right here in the city, somewhere—any kind of a job—and I'd work like hell. I could get a hundred to begin with, I'm pretty sure, and as soon as I'd doubled that we'd pull the big news."

"They'll all fall dead, Dan."

"No such luck! But let 'em yelp," Dan said comfortably, "we'll clear out, and after that we won't care. Now, don't get nervous about it," he added, smiling, as Cassy gasped, "because all we have to do is wait."

"I'll wait!" she promised him bravely.

"Keep up your nerve."

"Nerve!" she said scornfully. "Why, I'm just *bursting* with nerve and confidence—and courage—and everything else! I'm only waiting for everything to break. I'm spoiling for trouble!"

And her glowing face, under the satiny rings of hair that curled up against her little white hat, and her red lips, above the high-buttoned white coat, and her flashing blue-black eyes were so breath taking that Dan, awed and bashful and eager, could only murmur again:

"You *are* the most beautiful thing God ever made!"

"I could—listen to you all day, Dan," Cassy said dreamily. And with sudden animation she added, "I ought to call you Wallace! Did I tell you that I called you 'Dan' when I was talking to Papa the other day?"

"Help!" Dan said feebly.

"He didn't notice it. But Gert might," Cassy pursued. "So if I begin calling you Wallace——"

"I hate to give up that little 'Dan.' You say it differently from anyone else I ever heard say it," Dan protested. "It just turns me inside out whenever you say it."

"It can't be helped. Being found out would be fatal just now," Cassy reminded him firmly.

And she redoubled her cautions.

Yet it was only three days later that her father, quite casually, asked her, in the evening, to ring the bell for Wallace.

"Why, are you going somewhere, Papa?" Cassy asked, obeying him.

"No; I wanted to speak to him about to-morrow," Leroy Pringle said in an odd tone. But Cassy noticed nothing amiss. She had on an old black velvet gown, and she thought that she would be glad to have Dan see her in it, sitting like a little girl in a low chair by the fire with the white kitten in her lap.

Wallace stepped inside the door and stood there. Her impassive eyes and his impassive eyes exchanged only the fleeting shadow of a glance.

"Shut the door, Wallace," her father said. And immediately he added conversationally, "You took my daughter, Miss Catherine, to a lecture at Scottish Rites Auditorium about ten days ago?"

Cassy knew from the tone that everything was lost. The color drained from her face, leaving it thin and brown and childish-looking. She rose to her feet and pressed her hand over her heart.

"What I want to know," her father's freezing voice continued, "is where you really took her that night?"

"She went to the lecture, didn't she?" Dan said helplessly, huskily, his eyes not moving from the older man's face. Cassy felt her heart turn to water for sheer love of him, as she looked at him, standing there.

"Papa, she told us about it, I remember!" Gertrude's intellectual voice said eagerly.

"Keep out of this, Gertrude," Leroy Pringle said steadily.

Gertrude, with a little gasp, subsided. Mrs. Pringle, with a

face of death, was looking into the fire; by neither glance nor movement did she betray that she had heard anything.

"The lecture was called off that night because of Professor Newell's illness. I had the notice to-day," Cassy's father stated evenly.

"That's funny!" Dan muttered gruffly, stupidly, with a swift glance toward Cassy for help.

"We went to the movies on Polk Street, my dear father," Cassy said lightly, "and then to Blum's for a soda. And after this—debauch we came home."

"Yes? Well—" her father said slowly, the veins rising on his dark temples, and his face livid—"it will be some time before you go to the movies with your selected escort again. Wallace, there's a check there for you. Take it! I don't want to touch your hand."

"Papa, can't you see she's fooling? Cassy would no more do that than I would!" Gertrude exclaimed sharply, in the silence that was like the calm after a pistol shot.

"Oh, yes, I would, Gert!" Cassy interpolated, with a high nervous laugh.

"Keep *out* of this, Gertrude," Leroy Pringle said briefly.

"But I can't *believe* it!" Gertrude kept whispering, under her breath.

"You take that check," her father said measuredly to the chauffeur, "and you walk out of this room and out of my house! Pack your stuff and get out. If you're on this place one hour from now I'll have you run off by the police and kicked into the gutter where you belong! That's all."

"Say, look here, look here, sir," Wallace's voice said, suddenly strong and angry. "That kind of talk doesn't go with me. I've got a right to take your daughter or any other girl to a movie if she's willing to go!"

"Oh, my God, have mercy!" they could hear Mrs. Pringle whispering under her breath. "Oh, my God——"

"You leave my daughter to me!" the older man said quietly, significantly.

Gertrude was suddenly on her knees beside his chair.

"Oh, Papa, Papa! Don't you see that you have to forgive her—our little Cassy? Why, she's only a child—she wanted a little taste of forbidden fruit—she's had it now—and it's turned to ashes in her mouth! Dearest——"

"Let me go, Gertrude!" He was on his feet, and Cassy saw him and Dan facing each other at close range, their heads dropped forward like angry bulls, their eyes glittering together.

The mouldy old books, and the guttering Welsbach, the hot, dull room, with Mamma bowed in the patent rocker, and Gertrude still dramatically upon her knees, all flashed like a panorama upon Cassy's consciousness. She crossed the room in three steps and slipped her arm through Dan's and stood facing her father, with her tumbled head on a level with Dan's square shoulders.

"Don't you talk to Dan like that!" she panted.

"As for you, young lady," her father said, "perhaps a year or two in boarding school might have a cooling effect on you!"

"I won't go!" Cassy said boldly. "I'm not a child!"

The blood was racing in her veins, she felt her lungs swell with great breaths, she seemed suddenly bigger than Papa, bigger than the room, bigger than the house—able to soar above, to conquer them all.

"You go to your room," Leroy Pringle said, at white heat.

"I won't!" Cassy answered. She had never used the words in her life before. She turned to Dan, "I'm going with you, if you go!" she said.

Without moving his eyes from her father's face Dan put his arm about her shoulders. His face was white and set and troubled.

"I wouldn't ask you to do that, Cassy," he said gently. "That wouldn't be fair to her," he added, addressing the older man in an almost pleading tone.

"She can take her choice," Leroy Pringle observed dryly. The sweat glistened on his sallow face; his voice shook.

"I've made it!" Cassy announced.

"No, dear—no, dear," Dan said, shaking his head, without

looking at her, in the circle of his arm. "You've got to consider, Cassy. There's lots more to it than just—us going away."

"There's no more to it than that," Cassy's father interrupted him harshly. "She can go with you now, to-night. Or she can promise to come to her senses and never speak to you again!"

"What nonsense!" Cassy exclaimed in the silence, with a little scornful laugh.

"Cassy!" Gertrude breathed, outraged.

"Make your choice," Leroy Pringle droned inflexibly. But the dull red color had come up into his elderly sallow face, and his jaw was set.

"I've made it, I tell you!" Cassy answered. She jerked at Dan's arm, both her own slim arms about it. "Come on, Dan!" she said courageously.

"It's not as easy as that," Dan muttered, still looking at her father in obvious distress. "You—you stay here," he said, "and I'll get out——"

The girl drew away a little, to regard him with amazement. Her father laughed harshly and mirthlessly.

"That's *his* advice!" he said sarcastically.

Cassy drew herself up proudly, a slim figure in the old black velvet, her cheeks childishly red, her eyes and mouth stubborn.

"I'm going with Dan, of course!" she stated quietly. "I'll go —I'll go get my coat and hat," Cassy added a little vaguely.

"Just a moment!" said her father, his face livid. "You choose this man to-night, Cassy, and you choose him for life," he reminded her heavily. "You disobey me in this matter, and I'm done with you! Not as long as I live will I ever see you or speak to you again, and what I have to leave will go to others—to your sister. Think well, now."

He stopped abruptly, and there was a moment's silence in the room.

"You can't scare me with such talk!" Cassy then remarked contemptuously. She resumed her hold on Dan's arm and gave him a little sidewise glance full of confidence.

"Listen, Cassy," Dan said nervously, eagerly, as if they two

were alone in the room. "I haven't got a place for you—I haven't got a job. Maybe your father's right, for awhile. I'm sorry we've made him so mad, but we didn't do anything wrong, and after awhile, when I get a different sort of work——"

"Cassy, darling, money *is* important!" Gertrude pleaded tearfully, at Cassy's side now, with a sisterly arm about her.

Cassy shook her off; her wide eyes were fixed in astonishment on Dan.

"Why, you're not going to leave me here?" she whispered.

"Gee," he said youthfully, "it seems to me I haven't any choice! You've been accustomed——"

"The money appears to have more value to Wallace than to you, Cassy," her father said.

"Is it lots?" she asked carelessly, moving her eyes from Dan's face to his.

"Yes, it's considerable; more than half a million," Leroy Pringle said, almost reverently, after a second's hesitation. "It means comfort—luxury all your life."

"I'm glad it's so much!" Cassy observed. "Because it shows you, Dan—it shows you——"

Her voice broke for the first time, and her eyes filled with tears. She turned her back on the others and laid both hands on Dan's broad shoulders.

"Get me out of here, Danny!" she whispered.

Leroy Pringle took out his old-fashioned watch and snapped it open. His face was a mask. Mrs. Pringle, behind him, was sobbing and moaning softly. Gertrude was now beside her father, one loyal hand on his shoulder.

"I'll give you exactly five minutes, Cassy," the older man said in a hard voice. "I'll give you five minutes to make up your mind to throw your lot in with this—servant—or to come to your senses. You get out of here, Wallace, in any case. Take your check!"

"Thanks, I don't seem to care about it!" Wallace gritted through set teeth.

"I don't need five minutes, Papa," Cassy said. "You wait for

me at the side door," she whispered in an undertone to Dan. "Mamma, don't feel badly, because I'm so happy!" She kissed the collapsed gray coil of her mother's hair as she passed. "Good-bye, Gert. Good-bye, Papa! Love me all you can and forgive me everything mean I ever did. I'll come and see you some day!"

She disappeared. Wallace had already gone. Mrs. Pringle continued her frightened weeping and her whispered prayers. Gertrude did not change her position at her father's side. Leroy Pringle stood motionless, looking at the open face of his watch.

"She'll never do it!" said Gertrude breathlessly, listening.

"No, I don't think she will," the man agreed. But he too was breathing hard, and the hand that held the watch trembled.

The coals sucked, and the clock ticked solemnly in the silence. Outside in the dark, palm branches clished together in the old garden. The gas rose suddenly to a harsh thin roar.

Silence. Silence. It was like a living presence among them.

Suddenly they were all electrified by the sound of quick feet in the passage outside the library door. Someone had run downstairs, and the handle of the side door clicked under quick fingers. There was the echo of a few rapid words, indistinguishable.

Then the side door banged heavily, and again there was the silence of death in the old Pringle house.

Chapter V

THE street was very dark; the spring night cool and cloudy. There was no moon, and the sky was veiled with a high sweep of fog. Underfoot the sidewalks glistened black from it.

"Here, I'll take your suitcase, Cassy!" Dan said gruffly. He laughed suddenly, nervously.

"Oh, why should you!" Her voice was gay, excited. "Dan, will they follow us?"

"I don't think so."

"We must think of that," Cassy said, half running and half jumping along beside him. "We mustn't go to any of the big hotels. Papa'll think of them the first thing."

"We won't," Dan promised her significantly, hurrying her along. And again he laughed briefly.

"Well, it had to come sooner or later," she said philosophically. "And I'm glad it came sooner! I don't feel badly a bit, do you, Dan?"

"My God!" he said, under his breath.

"Where are we going?" Cassy asked, innocently expectant.

"I wish I knew!" Dan muttered, with a rueful laugh.

"Let's get on this car and ride out to the end of the line and back," the girl suggested brightly. "Then we can talk!"

"That wouldn't do any good!"

"Well, we can't wander about carrying these suitcases."

She mounted the big car and preceded him to the open seats in its dark front vestibule. "Here, we're all right here!" Cassy said in satisfaction.

Dan sat down in the dark beside her and instantly her soft little hand was in his.

"Isn't this *fun!*" she breathed ecstatically.

"Yep. But we've got to do something. Listen," he said, in a serious undertone. "Have you got an aunt you could go to for a night or two?"

"No, I haven't," Cassy answered casually. "Isn't Mission

Street gorgeous at night, Dan! No, Aunt Rose is scared to death of Papa, and she's the only aunt I have," she said, undisturbed.

"Cassy, you'll have to concentrate on this. It may be darned serious," Dan warned her anxiously.

"Dan, *dear,* if I had an aunt, believe me I'd be glad enough to tell you! But Aunt Rose is simply *no* good for anything like this."

"Well, how about a friend?" he pursued nervously, hurriedly. "Have you got a friend you can trust?"

For the first time Cassy appeared to appreciate that something was wrong. She turned her artless eyes upon him concernedly.

"Dan, dear, what's the trouble?"

The man laughed a short, desperate laugh.

"Great Scott—everything!" he answered.

"Oh, now, don't get fussed," Cassy, snuggling up against him, entreated him maternally. "We were going to have this blow-up anyway, weren't we? And we were going to get married anyway, weren't we?"

"Yes," he admitted, smiling reluctantly as he looked down into her eyes, glowing in the dark.

Her slender, strong young arm gave his a hug.

"Well, then?" she said triumphantly. "Oh," she burst forth on a long breath, "if you knew the relief of getting it all over, and being out—in the street, safe, alone with you! No wonder I'm acting crazy!"

He looked at her again, and leaning toward her, dropping his head close to hers, he explained patiently.

"Now, this is the whole thing, Cassy. We're in Dutch. We can get out of it, I think—I know we will! But we haven't got any money, I haven't got a job, you aren't accustomed——"

"Oh, please forget all that about what I'm accustomed to!" Cassy begged, digging her soft little forehead against his in the dark.

"Well, all right, then. But to begin with, I can't take you to a hotel to-night."

"Why not?" Cassy demanded interestedly.

"Well, because—for one thing, your father could raise the devil of a rumpus if he found us."

"Oh, well, he won't!" the girl said comfortably.

"Gosh, you are a little simp!" Dan observed, with something nearer his natural manner and laugh than he had shown since entering the library an hour ago. "You were born yesterday morning at eleven o'clock, weren't you?"

"I know much more than you think!" Cassy said, delighted with his change of mood.

"All right, then. What do you think we should do now?"

"Why, go to a hotel and register as Mr. and Mrs. Wallace!"

"All right. And get married to-morrow, I suppose?"

"Well, certainly! And then I'll house-hunt, and you go look for a new job."

"As a chauffeur, huh?"

"No, because you have to be home nights," Cassy decreed calmly.

"I see. So we get married on fifty dollars——"

"Have you got fifty dollars, Dan?" She was pleased and surprised.

"About, I guess. I've got about thirty-five in the bank and some here."

"I've got about eighteen," said Cassy. "I know I've got a five and a ten and some silver. What's the matter with that?"

"It's not enough. It's not one tenth of what we ought to have," Dan said, suddenly depressed again. "What about rent and food and everything?"

"It's enough to start!"

"I love you," he said, his young voice very anxious, "and I'm bringing you to nothing but poverty, trouble, and misery! You're a rich man's daughter——"

"Accustomed——" Cassy interpolated warningly.

"Well, you are! I want to do everything right for you, Cassy, and I've no right to marry you. Here—listen to this," Dan said resolutely. "I never told you this, because I thought I'd have time to straighten everything up before we ever thought of get-

ting married. I thought I'd get another job, and make a start, and pay off my debts."

"I love you," Cassy murmured, digging her face against his again.

"No, but listen. I owe a hell of a lot of money!"

"How? To whom?"

"Oh, I borrowed it when I was going into the air service. I borrowed a couple of hundred from a bank, and a hundred from one fellow, and fifty from another——"

"Well, we'll pay it off!" Cassy said hopefully.

"I'll be darned if I know what to do!" Dan muttered under his breath.

The car had reached its terminal and was returning to the familiar Mission streets.

"There, there's a nice clean-looking hotel called the Dresden," Cassy observed, peering out. "Come on, let's go there."

"I tell you this can't turn out right!" he protested half heartedly, in the street. He followed her slowly.

Cassy watched him interestedly as he registered in the big book, her tongue caught between her teeth. "Mr. and Mrs. Wallace Daniels, Watsonville, Calif." She caught a triumphant breath when they had been led upstairs by an elderly bell boy, and put in possession of a bare, dark bedroom.

"There, that wasn't so hard, was it?" she said with a laugh of childish triumph. She hung out of the window, studying the busy Saturday night street. "I'll tell you what, Dan," she suddenly suggested brightly, "let's go out and walk around. We can't get a job, we can't house-hunt, and we can't get married to-night, so why not have a good time?"

Dan looked at her, and his wistful, wondering laugh suddenly brightened his eyes.

On their way down through the unspeakably dreary dark hallways she gave an excited, happy little jump.

"I've never stayed in a hotel before, Dan!"

"Well, for the Lord's sake, don't judge 'em by this one!" he said fervently.

"Dan, isn't this fun! Going along here all by ourselves and not having to go back home!"

"I'll feel happier this time to-morrow."

"Because we'll be married?"

"Well, yes. I'll feel better when I know it's settled once and for all."

"I need toothpaste!" They went into a brightly lighted drug store, and he paid for the little tube.

"Sundae?" he suggested.

"No, but I'll tell you! I'm starving. Could we find a nice little place and eat?"

"I know a place—down a few blocks . . ."

Opposite her, in the cleanest of white dairy kitchens, with waffles between them, he laughed out suddenly and boyishly.

"What is it?" she said eagerly.

"This is the darnedest *yet,*" Dan answered obscurely.

"But, Danny"—it was her old argument—"isn't it *fun!*"

They talked for an hour; they had talked alone before, but never so quietly, so memorably. Dan took a pencil out of his pocket and an old envelope, and they figured seriously.

"But we're counting on only a hundred!" Cassy would say. "And we may have twice that."

She set down a neat twenty-five dollars for rent. "It's oceans!" decided Cassy.

"You're a wonder," Dan told her.

"Oh, why?" She glowed with pleasure.

"The way you are taking all this."

"But how *should* I take it?" Cassy demanded.

"Well, we may get away with it," he said dubiously.

"Oh, Dan, dear, *do* cheer up!" Cassy exclaimed impatiently. "We have everything anyone needs to get married on! And we could have such fun if you wouldn't gloom all the time!"

A sudden look of determination came into Dan's handsome face, and a new tone into his voice as he said:

"All right, dear. We're committed to it now; there's no way out. We'll make a go of it somehow, I guess."

"Well, now you're talking like yourself!" Cassy approved.

He leaned across the bright, clean little table, the restaurant lights shining in his eyes.

"You mean you're really going to take a chance with me, Cassy?" he said a little huskily. "You mean that you want to be my wife—and keep house for me—and write your name 'Mrs. Wallace'? Is—is that all there is to it?"

"Why, good heavens, Dan!" she answered, tears in her eyes, "what do you think we've been talking about all this time?"

He cleared his throat. He was smiling, but his own eyes were brimming.

"I suppose we were talking of—this," he said simply. "I suppose I've thought about—marriage, before. But it all seems so different. It seems such a tremendous thing to have a girl like you willing . . ."

And presently he got up and squared his shoulders, and they went to the cash register and paid the check. Cassy took a marigold from a jar on the desk.

"This is my wedding bouquet," she said in the street. Her arm was heavy on his arm, the lights blinded her, and the crowd tired her.

They went back to the Dresden, and Cassy seemed for the first time a little vague and wavering.

"I haven't the remotest idea how to wash my face and brush my hair and do my teeth in a hotel!" she said with a weary laugh.

"Got a wrapper?" Dan asked in a matter-of-fact tone.

"I've got a kimono."

"Then get out of your dress and put your wrapper on over your other things," Dan said. "And then take your outfit and go across the hall to that room marked 'Bath.'"

"It's fun!" she said dauntlessly.

"I wouldn't undress any further—we may have to get out in a hurry if they follow us," Dan told her in the same quite unconcerned voice, when she came back refreshed and fragrant, with her wet towels and brushes in her hand. "Just lie down on those

pillows there, and I'll put the comforter over you, and try to get some sleep."

"But, Dan, where'll you sleep?"

"I'm going to sit at the window for awhile. Your dear Papa may take a notion to intrude upon us."

"Oh, how could he?" Cassy said on a long yawn that was like a moan. "Come kiss me," she commanded drowsily.

Dan went over, big, clumsy, and gentle, and knelt beside the bed, and she put her bare, young brown arms, from which the kimono sleeves fell free, about his neck, and rested her face, in its frame of loose curls, against his cheek.

"Isn't this fun, being all by ourselves, Danny?"

"I'll be glad when you belong to me, my dear, and when they can't take you away. And I'll be glad when I get a job," Dan said on a long, weary, happy sigh.

"As if that mattered, Dan! As long as you love me!"

"I'm just beginning to realize how much a man *can* love a woman, Cassy."

"And do you like it, Dan?"

"No," he said slowly and simply. "I think it kinder scares me."

He crushed his big arms about her slender shoulders, and drew her—warm, smooth cheeks, tumbled curls, and fragrant mouth—close to him in a great embrace.

Then he got to his feet and went again to the chair by the window, and Cassy settled down on her pillows, watching him contentedly. His chair had a slanted back, and his head rested against it, his chin in the air, the loose locks of his fair hair falling on the shabby old upholstery. He had put out the light, but bright angles and bars of street light came in on the walls and the ceiling.

Her last sleepy glance at night showed him there, and when she awakened in the morning he was still sitting in the same chair, but erect now, and groomed, and dressed for the day.

It was an untimely hot spring morning, the air that came in at the open window was still fresh and sweet, but there was every promise of a scorching day. Cassy was as radiant as the day itself

when presently she came downstairs in her dark blue gown and hat, ready for adventure.

Dan was waiting for her in the dismal foyer. She slipped her arm into his as they stepped into the street.

"Wedding, job, and home!" she enumerated them happily. "Not many people have to find them all in one day!"

"We'll manage the wedding first, Miss Pringle," Dan said, in high spirits, "and after that wherever you are will be home to me, and something tells me that you'll be my job!"

Her exultant, ecstatic laugh broke forth.

"Oh, I love you to be happy, Dan!" she said.

He was indeed strangely happy; nor was that all. Cassy told herself more than once, during the wonderful long day, that dearly as she had loved him yesterday she had never known Dan until now. She kept sending him shy little glances that brimmed with utter adoration.

Dan took entire charge of the proceedings at the City Hall, and Cassy, who had dreaded that, found it all rather diverting. Then he said that he knew a pippin of an old minister who would marry them, and that pleased Cassy, too; to be wedded in a peaceful, charming rectory parlor, with the minister's young daughter for witness, seemed the right way to start.

Afterward Dan sent a telegram to her father and immediately announced that they must lunch. It was thrilling, somehow, to have one's husband assuming responsibility!

And through it all Dan was so absorbed, so capable, so like a busy small boy, that Cassy loved him more and more every minute. He got two morning papers, while they lunched, and they read columns of advertisements about flats, and apartments, and housekeeping rooms to rent.

They fell into wild laughter over them. Cassy read aloud:

" 'Large, sunny rooms—unusually large—elegantly furnished —sunshiny—all outside—unusually bright—beautiful French flat.' Danny," Cassy asked, "isn't it lucky that every flat in the city is unusually large, elegantly decorated, and sunshiny?"

"And at a low rent, don't forget that," he said.

"Dan, we have twenty good ones, now. Let's start looking!"

And she gave her customary jump of sheer excitement in the street.

"Cassy, control yourself. You're a married woman, you know!"

"I know. Do you know, Dan, apart from everything else, it's the *greatest satisfaction* to me not be an old maid," Cassy confessed artlessly.

"This is going to be ghastly," Dan said, when they had seen four apartments.

"I love it!" Cassy stated firmly. "It's wonderful!"

"I think maybe you are the sort of person who makes everything wonderful," Dan said humbly.

The apartments were strangely distant from the street car; they smelled of dust, of new paint on rotted old wood, of plumbing, of grease. A dark back parlor and a closet with a gas plate in it, forty. Two small third-floor rooms, two flights above the bathroom, thirty-five. A whole dark, gloomy basement flat, six terrible rooms, for fifty. The windows gave upon areas dark with cement, the place was black, even in broad spring afternoon light.

"Dan, how dare they ask fifty dollars for that horrible den?"

"They'll get it," Dan observed.

"It smelled!" Cassy observed, dismissing it forever.

It was five o'clock when they pulled their aching feet up the steps that mounted between wide balustrades to the Cannon house. It stood on Shotwell Street, on a raised, shabby square of battered garden that looked dirty and neglected in the hot spring sunset.

All around the garden, above the brick bulkhead, there had once been a low fence of scalloped pickets. But most of the pickets were gone now, and the others were broken and discolored. Facing on the side street there still stood a magnificent great wooden stable, with a weathercock above, but the sides of the pretentious old building had been ripped open, and garage doors yawned wide upon a rabble of broken, disreputable, topless, collapsing little cars, within. Whatever odds and ends of pipe, rope, machinery, rusty tools, oil stains, dirt stains, rank, dry yellowed

weeds could do to enhance the forlorn disorder of the place had been done; the roadway to the street was a mere gash, the sidewalk at this point was several inches under bedded dirt.

In the big, bare, dirty yard a few stunted fruit trees and a few disconsolate stripped peppers and eucalyptus trees reigned over what had once been the famous garden of old Judge Hiram Cannon. Dirty masses of pampas grass, marguerite bushes loaded thick with withered brown flowers, and stretches of vagabond periwinkle still testified to its glories, but between the shrubs and flowers were barren spaces where children had made channels and caves, heaps of ashes in which a few lean hens fluffed suspiciously, and areas of waste yellow grass through which rank, dry spears of mignonette, outflung rose suckers, and seeding marigolds were tangled.

The house itself stood high and disreputable upon a mound of trampled earth; heliotrope and morning glories had been half-heartedly encouraged to embellish its stark exterior here and there, but they languished in the general decay, and sections of porch railing, balustrades, and the crossed laths that had once veiled the under-porch spaces, had also been gradually torn, or kicked, or had fallen, away.

It was a square house without bay windows and with a wide porch running across the front on the parlor floor. Four French windows, opened in to-day's heat and draped in limp, mud-colored lace, gave upon this porch. Between them was an elegant old fan-lighted door, with much of the side glass broken, and a gaping hole where the mail box once had been. The house rose tall and bare and uncompromising for two high stories, and then sloped back slightly for a mansard roof punctured with windows at regular intervals. In the centre, at the top, was a twenty-foot cupola made all of dirty, uncurtained windows.

It was to the mansard roof that Mrs. Harney, present lessee of the old Cannon house, led the young Wallaces. They passed through halls that displayed every variation that shoddiness, slovenliness, and poverty assume in such old houses. Spotted carpets were worn down to the brown coarse strings of the warp and

bulged and raveled under foot; faded old wall papers were thick with spots and streaks, scratches, and the marks of greasy hands. Doors hung laxly open, and the occupants of the upper floors looked out, half clad, at the newcomers. A young woman, holding a kimono snugly about herself and carrying a garbage pail, passed them on the stairs.

"The sooner the quicker!" Dan breathed in Cassy's ear.

"Hopeless?" she asked, with a flashing quick look.

"Well, *look* at it!"

They went up, however, to the advertised suite, "unusually large, bright, furnished rooms for housekeeping," and discovered it to consist of one enormous dormered room whose southern and western windows were flooded with light from the descending sun, despite the fact that cracked greenish-brown roller shades had been drawn against it.

On the bare floor of this room an old carpet square, unbound, was lying; there was a round drop-leaf table, battered, nicked, and scarred, against a wall, and against another wall a large thin, shabby double bed of iron with dingy brass knobs. Upon it lay two thin pillows and some thin, clean, much-washed blankets, but it was not made.

The remaining furniture consisted of two small chairs and one large comfortable old armchair with holes in its upholstery and one foot gone, a shabby little walnut washstand with a pitcher and basin, and a battered great chest of drawers.

Opening off the room were two closets; one, very spacious and bright, with a large window, had been made into a kitchen. It had a small iron sink, one faucet, and some shelves upon which were a few oddly assorted plates, two small saucepans, one frying pan, and a miscellaneous collection of odd knives, forks, and spoons. On the left-hand sink board was a gas plate with two burners and a movable worn tin oven.

Cassy brightened when she saw this apartment and turned animatedly to Dan.

"Oh, I like this little kitchen, Dan!"

A scene from the Metro-*Goldwyn*-Mayer All-Talking Picture "Passion Flower," a William de Mille Production.

"Oh, cut it!" he said incredulously, under his breath. To Dan this was merely a waste of time.

"You could make a lovely little suit of it," observed Mrs. Harney, with weary enthusiasm. "There'd never be a day you wouldn't have the sunshine floodin' the place. I have a spread I could let you have for that bed, and when your own things were round you'd be fixed real well."

She opened the closet door, drew out drawers, and adjusted shades apathetically. She was a thin young woman in an old silk dress and wet apron.

"There's curtains for these windows," she remarked, "but I sent them to the wet wash, and they won't be back until Friday!"

"Oh, that's all right!" Cassy assured her politely.

"Let's emerge quietly into God's great out-of-doors," Dan murmured in her ear.

"Dan, this place really could be fixed up!"

"With two sticks of dynamite and a coroner," Dan agreed.

Her delicious spurting laughter repaid him.

"Ask the rent," she whispered.

The rent was complicated, it appeared, by Mrs. Harney's dental troubles and the fact that many of the trashy new apartments downtown were nothing but boxes crowded together that you wouldn't want a dog to die in. Also there was the lawsuit, which prevented Mrs. Harney from painting the house.

"It's the old Cannon estate?" Mrs. Harney said interrogatively. Dan and Cassy answered together significantly, "Oh?" and nodded their heads. "So you see how I'm fixed," said Mrs. Harney.

It seemed that she could not let it go for less than fourteen. The last lady had paid twelve and a half, Mrs. Harney would tell them frankly, but she had had to raise all over the house.

Cassy gave a violent shudder when she heard the sum mentioned. It was the shudder of the bargain hunter, agonized with fear lest she betray her find.

"And I have to make it in advance, and I'll tell you why, dear," explained the landlady. "The less talk there is . . ."

In the full flood of it Cassy observed, out of deep thought, that she must speak alone to Mr. Wallace.

They went into the kitchen.

"Dan, I like it."

"You're crazy!" Dan said, stupefied.

"I tell you, with all this sunshine—think of the *dens* we've seen!—and that nice woman, for she *is* nice—and only fourteen dollars a month! Danny, I'm for it."

"I think you're crazy," he said dazedly again.

But in the end he gave way, and Cassy entered into immediate negotiations with her first landlady.

"Now, about sheets, Mrs. Harney. And towels."

"Well, how soon would you want to come in, dear?"

"Oh, to-night. Mr. Wallace and I are just here from Watsonville, and we're at the Dresden, and we're not one bit comfortable!"

"Well, I could lend you some for to-night," Mrs. Harney said, brightening. "But I couldn't go ahead without at least I'd have a deposit on me rent."

"Now, you go back to the hotel and get our bags," Cassy directed Dan when that was all settled and Mrs. Harney had returned to her own regions downstairs. "And I'll lie down. And then we'll go out and get pepper and salt and everything."

She had taken off her hat and put it and her gloves and bag into the big closet in the most businesslike way imaginable, and now she performed a sort of pirouette about the big, dim, faded room, and ended by throwing her arms about Dan's neck and kissing him in a gale of weary sweetness and softness and laughter.

"Dan, don't you begin to feel *married!*"

"You are the best sport God ever made," he stated simply. "I'll give you a nicer home than this, Cassy!" he promised huskily, one arm about her.

"But isn't this fun?" she coaxed, exultant.

The reluctant smile she loved twitched at his fine, wide mouth, and his big square teeth flashed in an unwilling smile.

"Well, we may get away with it, at that."

Cassy, weary as she was, was anxious to cook her first dinner in the new quarters, but Dan demurred, and in the end they went back to dine at the Dairy Kitchen. Afterward they raided the five-and-ten-cent store, the Piggly Wiggly and Jenny Wren, the nine-nineteen-and-ninety-cent Emporium, and "The La Elite Bake Shoppe." They bought a ten-cent basket and a ten-cent paper bag in which to carry their treasure. Cassy bought a dark blue bungalow apron for ninety-nine cents; they bought soap, sugar, butter, coffee, bewilderingly attractive rolls, and a small bottle of cream. Displayed in the doorway of a hardware store Cassy found two blue bowls at three cents each, and Dan capitulated utterly to the charm of an egg poacher at fifteen cents.

"Gee, I love poached eggs."

"You shall have them!"

"On toast, huh?"

"Certainly on toast!"

"Well, you can do it without these things—you can do them right in hot water—I've seen my mother. But that certainly is cute," Dan mused wistfully, lingering beside the poacher still.

"Oh, well, let's have it, then!"

"I don't know. It's sort of an extravagance!"

"We'll take it," Cassy said decidedly to the salesman.

Dan contentedly carried it as they went back to the bright, thrilling street.

Their arms aching, their hands stretched, and their fingers cut by thin sharp strings, they returned to the Cannon house at nine o'clock and hilariously mounted to their own rooms, through the odorous warm hallways, and between the laxly hung doorways and the curious eyes. Every door and window was wide open; the spring evening was unusually warm, and the thin, forlorn old house gushed feeble lights like a house of cardboard with a candle inside it.

The bright new little cans and boxes were all ranged tidily by Cassy on the shelves; the blue bowls added a decorative note to the dingy main room. Eggs and cream bottle went on the wide

window sill, a precedent observed by Cassy in other apartments in the house and quickly adopted.

Afterward they leaned together on one of their wide high window sills, and looked down at the street, and listened to the symphony of noises in the old house below them.

Men's voices, women's voices, and the high chatter and shrill crying of children. Doors banging, china and cutlery clinking. More than one Victrola, and the radio contending bravely with them in a roaring buzz. Steps running up and down uncarpeted stairs. A slap and a shriek.

"There are eleven children in this house, Dan."

"I'm surprised to hear it. I thought there were four hundred."

She put her head down on the window sill to laugh feebly.

"Doesn't it seem much longer than last night that we left home?" she asked presently.

They speculated about what the abandoned household was experiencing; whether Cassy's father would give the news to the press.

"I don't want his money."

"Neither do I, Dan." She meditated, and then asked, "How much have we?"

"We have eleven dollars and twenty cents," he said reluctantly after investigation.

"Oh, that's oceans!" Cassy assured him easily. "You see, we've done two thirds of what we had to do this morning," she summarized the situation optimistically. "We're married, we've found a house, and moved in. We said twenty-five dollars' rent, and we've done much better than that, we have food for to-morrow, and our rent's paid, and we have eleven dollars. Dan, I call that *grand.*"

"I'll take your word for it!" he said dubiously. "Maybe you can stretch it; I'll be darned if I think anyone else could!"

"Stretch it? Why do I have to stretch it? All I need is food for a few days and some little brass hooks to hang things on.

"I can't *get over* the convenience of electric light!" she said

somewhat later. Dan, finding no other response handy, merely tightened his arm about her shoulders.

"Mind you, I thought they might be bride and groom," Mrs. Harney, comfortably nursing the baby in a lair far downstairs, observed to her husband at about this time. "She had such a little-girl look on her, peepin' out from under his arm, and she was so tickled with the suit. But I was just up on the landin' to see was Miss Daley's cough better, and you'd know, to hear the way the two of them's talkin', that they'd been marri'd some time. She's got the brains of the outfit, and she's the one that's in love, if you'd ask me. They was puttin' away the groceries and chattin' and laughin' together."

"She looked very superior to me, goin' on up the stairs wit' him, from what you'd think," Mr. Harney commented mildly, after a long silence, taking his pipe from his mouth.

"He's so handsome he ought to be in the movies!" Regina Harney commented shrilly.

Her mother lowered her head over the baby's blissful little working face and looked at Regina menacingly.

"If you know all that and you've done your homework," she said dryly, "in your place I'd get my beauty sleep!"

Chapter VI

It was some five days later that young Mrs. Wallace, essaying a vegetable purée for a soup, burned her hand, spilled her purée, and retired to the open window sill to nurse her injuries with what endurance she might.

Her whole right hand and the corner of her apron enveloped the injured fingers; she writhed and whispered aloud in pain.

"Oo—my *golly!* Oo—that hurts!"

Suddenly she was weeping bitterly, with her head down on the window sill. The tears came in wild floods, her whole body shook with sobs. Her eyes were drowned, her cheeks sopping, her breast convulsed with the violence of nameless grief.

After awhile she stopped and wiped her eyes on her apron, and looked out dreamily into the silence of the hot street. It was half-past eleven o'clock, the children were all in school, and the humble marketing of the neighborhood was long done. Spring had found out Shotwell Street with the rest of the world; the air was soft and balmy, the sky very blue, and there were lilacs and bridal wreath tumbling in mad luxuriance in all the shabby gardens.

Released babies played peacefully in back yards that were emerald green after spring rains. A vegetable cart, heaped with bright carrots and cabbages, drove slowly through the sleepy street.

Cassy's tears dried on her cheeks. She remained motionless, thinking, until the whistles droned noon. Then she roused herself and went contentedly back to her work.

That night she told Dan about it.

"Oh, I had the most luscious purée—it was marvelous! And the handle of that—well, that damn blue saucepan got red hot over the other burner, and when I grabbed it—well, look!"

"Oh, my Lord!" Dan whispered, shutting his eyes at the sight of the bandaged fingers. "My darling, I can't bear to have you burn yourself!"

"Well, it isn't much of a burn, but I got so *mad!* And I went over to the window there," confessed Cassy, "and howled."

"Cassy, you didn't cry!"

"Cry? I bellowed. I boo-hooed, to use a favorite expression of mine. You should have heard me!"

"Don't tell me!" he whispered, shutting his eyes again. "Did it hurt so much?"

"Oh, it wasn't the pain! But—I don't know——" She had been smiling. Now suddenly her lip shook and her eyes filled again. She left her seat, and came about the rickety old table, and got into his lap. "I was thinking of Mamma," she said in a thick voice, taking hold of his ears and gently shaking his head about with them, as if they were handles. "And—I don't know! I looked out of the window, and everyone looked so—so poor, around here. All the little coveralls faded to pale blue on the clothes-lines, and women in such drabby aprons, and no paint anywhere . . ."

Talking half seriously, in a deliberate little affectation of self-pity, she was amazed to see his face whiten and an anxious look of fear come into his eyes.

"That's just—*it,*" he said desperately.

"Just what?"

"Well, just what I was afraid of, Cass."

Courage and a little shame returned to her in a rush, and she said affectionately:

"Why, you're yellow, aren't you, Dan? You're chicken livered, my boy! I always suspected it."

"No, no, no, darling," he murmured, his lips against her hair, his arms tight about her. "But you're so sweet, and you're so brave! And I want so to have it all go right—I want it to work out."

"And isn't it, you sap?" Cassy said, rubbing her head up and down against his cheek. "Why, I've had burns and I've cried in my life before," she reminded him between little carefully placed kisses, "and the only difference is that I didn't have my Danny to comfort me."

"That's all I *can* do, Cass."

"But isn't that everything? Isn't great love—real love between a man and his girl everything?"

"It's everything to me. I think all day long about coming home and climbing up those long stairs to you, and having my bowl of soup, and seeing the sunset," he said humbly.

"And do you suppose my father and mother, for all their money, ever were as happy as that?"

"You know they weren't!"

"Well——" She rested against him, contentedly musing, for a space. "As for poor Gertrude——" she presently added pityingly.

"Here's something that happened to-day," Dan began suddenly, in a long, happy silence. "I thought I wouldn't tell you, because it doesn't amount to anything, really. But, anyway, this was it. I was down on the end of the dock to-day, checking some German stuff, and old Koenig came over——"

"Who's he?"

"He's the boss. So he said to me: 'I never can remember your name?' 'Wallace,' I said. I said, 'They name lions for me, sometimes.'"

"And did he laugh, Dan?"

"Yes, he kinder laughed. So then he said, 'Have you done this kind of work before?' and I said, 'No.' 'Why are you doing it now?' he said. 'Well,' I said, 'because there's five dollars a day in it, and I have a young wife.' 'But it doesn't last,' he said; 'there happens to be a bunch of ships coming in now, but there's times when there won't be a ship for days.' 'Well,' I said, 'when I'm laid off, I'll begin to hunt for a regular job!'

"That was all there was to that. But I kind of liked his picking me out."

"Oh, I think that was really encouraging!" Cassy exclaimed. Her depression of the morning had vanished, she was in her happiest mood; older and wiser than she had been before that unexplained burst of tears this morning, yet she saw no change in herself, and Dan only thought her a little more loving, more engaging, more infinitely dear than before.

Within a week they were living by a settled routine. Dan had to be down on the dock at eight o'clock, and Cassy got up at half-

past six and gave him his breakfast promptly at seven. She put her apron on over her pajamas and thrust her bare feet into felt slippers, pattering contentedly to and fro between kitchen and table, putting toast, coffee, and eggs before him.

At half-past seven he left, and Cassy had a long day in which to do her housekeeping. She had no system about it; she did it spasmodically and lazily, enjoying the novelty and independence of it all.

Mrs. Terry, with the two bad babies, in the rooms just below, had assured her that coffee grounds could be boiled two or three times, so the tin coffee pot sometimes was not cleaned out for several days. Cassy set it on the window sill that was her only refrigerator.

Every spare scrap of butter went into a thick little jelly glass, to be used for cooking. The kettle was put on over a low flame, and Cassy gathered the two plates, and the two cups, and the spoons, and Dan's egg cup in the sink, and busily put away the remainder of the loaf or the rolls, and brushed crumbs, and wiped sticky surfaces, humming all the time.

The two big dormer windows of the bedroom would be wide open on these balmy spring mornings, and scented airs would drift through the lofty apartment that sometimes seemed to her like a nest itself, high up among the shabby upper branches of the old pear and eucalyptus trees, with the other nests. Cassy made the bed briskly, neatly, pulling the sheets snugly, smoothing the blankets, and plumping the pillows.

Her kettle singing by this time, she would return to the small, sun-flooded kitchen and reduce it to absolute order in no time, putting away the last spoon and the last hot cup, drawing the creased and battered shade at the window, wiping the bleached boards of the sink scrupulously, and spreading her damp dish towel on the inverted dishpan.

On the window sill would be the opened can of cream, crusted yellow where the little stream trickled out, two frankfurters, a bowl of cold rice, and one jelly doughnut. And in the box under the sink were potatoes, four onions, three hard yellow apples, and

four turnips. Cassy would sigh, regarding the turnips. Dan didn't seem to care much for mashed turnip.

On her shelf, neatly ranged, were cornstarch and a bag with some macaroni in it, and one can of pea soup, and the mustard, of course, and a little five-cent box of seedless raisins that Dan had bought her one night for dessert but that she had secretly and thriftily saved for a pudding.

She looked at these things every day and meditated their possibilities. Then she made a list for market.

But before going out there often were other things to do. In the first place, there might be washing. Laundry work to Cassy hitherto had always seemed as remote from her own sphere of activities as coining the money she had once spent so easily, but it had assumed different proportions now.

"Why not?" she had thought daringly, during the first days of her marriage, when a little heap of handkerchiefs and socks and towels and napkins had been ready for the wash. And she had asked her neighbor downstairs laughing and shamefaced, "Is there anything mysterious about washing things, Mrs. Terry?"

"Except that the water in this house is as hard as rocks!" the other woman had answered surprisedly.

This had meant nothing at all to Cassy, who had immediately entered upon her first laundering experiment with a thrilled sense of adventure and suspense.

She had washed the small articles, and they had actually come out clean! Laughing with sheer exhilaration, she had again descended to Mrs. Terry's apartment, to borrow her electric iron.

"But how'll I know about paying you for the electric light?" she had at last remembered to ask. An uneasy look in her hostess's eyes had immediately given way to one of relief, and Mrs. Terry, after saying with a shamed little laugh that the worst of that would neither make nor break her, had suggested that Cassy take the iron upstairs to her own meter.

"It's these kids that eat the hospitality right out of you!" said Ruth Terry, with a rueful glance at her two fat, porridge-smeared babies.

Cassy ironed the handkerchiefs and the blue-and-white fringed napkins from the Japanese store, and proceeded boldly on, the following week, to the pillow slips and her own nightwear—and then Dan's nightwear, too, and his underwear.

It gave her a tremendous sense of power, not to be paying for these details; it was good to see that last five-dollar bill in her purse untouched.

"Why, all you have to do is wash them and iron them!" she said to herself in innocent surprise. Washing day at home had always seemed a terrible affair, with hot soapy steam and masses of soaked drying linen, and a crowded noisy kitchen making it a weekly horror to the household.

"It's only the children's things you really have to scrub!" Mrs. Terry reassured her. "You must boil things now and then, and blue them about every third time. You've got a grand chance, with that big line!"

For there was indeed a wash line, starting on pulleys from the kitchen window and attached to the top of the old barn. Cassy really liked to see her gallant little wash blowing there, stockings and dish towels, and blue-and-white table runners from Nagasaki. She would go to market with a dancing step, thinking about it, and that it would be "fun" to get home at noon and make herself a big sandwich with a five-cent slice of cheese in it, and enjoy a peaceful cup of tea in her high, scented little eyrie up in the sky and the treetops, and then take in her wash.

The little pulley would creak, and the fresh, stiff articles feel crisp and clean in her hands. Now they must be dampened and rolled up tight, and while Cassy worked over them her eyes would move with satisfaction to her dinner arrangements, the two sausages now flanked with three small dark kidneys, in a bowl, representing ten cents, a large sweet potato cut in four pieces, to be boiled and fried, and a small, wilted, somewhat discolored cauliflower, representing the investment of another five cents, freshening in cold water in the dish pan. Then there was the rice pudding, one cup milk, one-half cup sugar, one egg—"There it is, on that plate!" Cassy would rejoice—and of course the raisins.

"It says 'flavor to taste with lemon or vanilla,' " she would muse, studying her new Bible, a government pamphlet regarding economy in the kitchen. "But I haven't either. I wonder if a little peel cut off an orange would taste right? I'm lucky with experiments."

And then besides, for Dan's dinner, there were the rolls, and plenty of butter—and the five dollars untouched.

She would burst into wild singing, alone at the top of the forlorn old house whose pompous and elegant first occupant had perhaps not had half the satisfaction from his pretentious mansion that young Mrs. Wallace had.

When she went down from her own speckless, orderly domain to the congested rooms of the Terrys she usually held the baby while she talked. The Terrys, Cassy reflected in some puzzlement of spirit, were both richer and poorer than the Wallaces. Harry Terry was paid six dollars a day and often had overtime money as well, but they seemed to have trouble making ends meet.

Their three rooms were littered from end to end with the babies' garments, and their own garments, toys, dishes, rags, towels, paper bags, Mrs. Terry's hats, and purely decorative objects like vases, tidies, and pictures.

Mrs. Terry was a pretty young creature who could pull a cloche hat down over her blue eyes, get into a satin tube, step into slippers with five-inch pinnacle heels, and sally forth with the smartest of the girls.

But at home she usually wore a wet, dirty blue apron, and concealed her red hair in a lacy boudoir cap. She moved about her rooms in a futile, ineffectual fashion, now picking a wet garment from the floor to put it vaguely on a chair, now turning on a faucet briskly, only to forget it until the water was overflowing the sink onto the dirty floor.

Just watching her drove Cassy almost to madness. Cassy surreptitiously pinned and powdered, dressed and washed the small Terrys right under their mother's eyes without her seeming to see it.

"I thought maybe I'd get my dishes done first, and then if they

wouldn't take their naps, I'd wheel the both of them out to market, and see could I get Harry a good thick steak," Mrs. Terry would say, manicuring casually as she wandered to and fro. "When you have two of them, there's no use trying to get anything done, for you're never done, and that's the truth of it!"

Her sink would be piled high with dirty dishes and sooty pots over which flies hovered. Soap would melt in the cooling dish water, and the kettle boil itself madly dry on the stove. Mrs. Terry had a small coal attachment to her gas stove from which ashes sifted. Every bit of clothes line, every hook and chair and drawer in the room was jammed full of rags, string, papers, old garments, stockings long past mending, odd rubbers, kindling, and bags half filled with decaying food. Onions and potatoes sprouted hopefully in a box under the sink, milk soured in bottles, stews and puddings assumed a deep gray fur, pans of forgotten soup gave forth the dreadful odor of rancid fat. Little baby messes, soured mush and sucked cookies, lurked in ambush on all the chairs, and the children's unwashed garments sent an ammoniacal odor, not only through the three rooms, but into the hall as well. The cribs and beds in the Terry household were never made; Mrs. Terry would fumble under a welter of bedclothing to find her coat and the baby's other shoe. She liked to buy patent-leather shoes with pink and blue kid uppers for Lloydy, and he and Warren always wore colored socks with little colored garters to match, on their fat, dirty little legs.

"Wait until you have a couple of kids!" Ruth Terry sometimes said to Cassy.

Cassy would regard her seriously, with wide-open dark eyes. "Mr. Wallace isn't one bit fond of children, and he says he hopes we won't have any—not until he's settled, at least," she would say simply. And at this the other woman would look at her curiously, incredulously, with puzzled bright eyes.

Dan got home at half-past six. Cassy knew his step, flying up the bare, noisy stairs, and would be out in the hall to meet him, her face flushed from her culinary labors, her hands held wide

because of flour or grease, but her ardent, laughing kiss the preface to their enchanted evening hours together.

While he sat in the big chair with the propped foot, waiting and resting, she went gayly to and fro, a slender figure in a dark blue apron, absorbed in the business in hand.

"What ship are you on now, Dan?"

"Big freighter called the *Catalonia.*"

"I never heard of her. Interesting?"

"Kinder. Coffee."

"Coffee! I suppose they didn't break a sack?"

"No, but you can bet, if they do, that I won't be such a boob again! I never thought of it."

"Pounds and pounds of green coffee, and you shoveling it into the bay! I could wash coffee beans, you know, and roast them right here—it tells how in my new book. And coffee's our worst extravagance, Dan!"

He was less interested in their finances than she; he would arrest her with a big arm as she went by.

"You're my worst extravagance, my darling!"

And while she chattered animatedly of the Terrys, and the babies, and her own bargains in the market, and her achievements in the laundry line, he hardly listened to her; far more than by what she said he was entertained by the moving beauty of her face, and the scented sweetness of the little kisses on his hair or his temples, with which she punctuated her confidence.

"Dan, listen—a perfect *slab* of bacon—much more than a pound, only forty cents! I put it on the scales myself, on a little piece of oiled paper, and I called to old Mr. Bergerman, 'How much?' and he looked out of the big refrigerating room—see?—and said, 'How much you vant?' So I sort of laughed and said, 'Forty cents!' and he said, 'O.K.' "

"Well, how do you account for it, you cooking, ironing, cheating, kissy little party?"

"Oh, I answer his telephone for him, you know, and once his grandchild was there, and I was sort of playing with him."

"And how are you fixed for money, Baby?"

"Oh, I'm rolling! I have my five dollars."

"I don't see how you get that way. You always tell me you have five dollars. Don't you ever break it?"

"Well, yes. But often, when you give me another, I'll have two or three dollars, and I—I'm tight. Every time I see the way Ruth Terry manages I see that! I think she thinks I'm awful. She thinks she's poor, buying Harry steaks, and cream every day, and asparagus already! But we could live on what she throws out!"

"The main point being, do you love me?"

"The answer being—— Oh, my heavens, my muffins!"

And she would leap to the kitchen, not to return to his arms until he waylaid her again.

On Sunday they took life comfortably. This was the only day on which Cassy allowed them the extravagance of a newspaper and of real cream, their late breakfast was their lunch, and she always had something substantial and delicious for it.

They did not get up until eleven o'clock, although they sometimes wakened earlier and lay talking of themselves and their plans, while the summer air came fragrantly in at the shady west window, and the morning light moved graciously over the forlorn big room. The house below them would be in an uproar by this time, but they grew used to it, and nothing flawed the leisure of Sunday morning.

Cassy rose first and began preparations for breakfast, making herself unusually trim in anticipation of further plans. She dressed completely, all except her outer garment, and put on a big apron to protect her best shoes and stockings. Over their coffee, their eggs poached upon an elaborate foundation of the last of the chopped meat, and the last of the kidney stew, and the two mushrooms, and the buttered toast, they discussed the news of the day.

Afterward, at perhaps one o'clock, Cassy washed the dishes, and Dan carefully wiped them, and then Cassy made the bed, with Dan on the other side pulling everything just a little crooked, but anxious to help, and then they looked triumphantly about their shaded, orderly domain and departed in great spirits for the beach, the park, or a ball game.

Cassy liked the beach, but it was often cold and blowy there in July and August, and sometimes lost in thick fog. On those days they went to the park and wandered through the Aquarium and the museums, and sat under the plane trees listening to orchestra music that waned and rose as the summer breeze idly shifted.

Motor cars swept by them in a steady river; Cassy would look at their occupants with active interest. How very funny to be able to run around in a big machine that was costing money all the time, and perhaps to dine quite casually down the Peninsula somewhere, and spend two or three dollars on that one meal! Why, her table didn't cost her twice that in a whole week.

She always read the menus and budgets and housekeeping articles generally in the newspapers and magazines nowadays, and was surprised, and a little awed, to find that she beat the best of them. Nobody ever suggested that any family of two could live on the sum that Cassy and Dan Wallace lived on.

When the music was over they wandered slowly to the street car and, if the day was sunshiny, waited until they could get an outside seat. Dan would jump on and hold her place for Cassy, and Cassy always liked his praise of her quickness in following him.

And so home to the dreary Cannon house, that was never really dreary to Cassy. Dan never grew reconciled to its Sunday afternoon aspect of drifting newspapers, disorderly persons loafing in semi-dress, unshaved men, sticky, tired babies. But these persons were Cassy's friends now; she had been hungry for social contacts all her life without knowing it; she was not critical now. Her first shadow of a quarrel with Dan came because he thought she was too nice to them, and she thought he was rude.

"We'll get out of here, one of these days, Baby, and forget this dump!"

Long before this she had discovered, and with a little secret pain, that Dan was less ecstatically happy than she herself was. Natural enough, Cassy hastened to remind herself, because all this meant freedom, meant a chance to be herself, to her, whereas to Dan it meant serious responsibility and even a sort of shame.

He didn't like to have his wife doing her own work in two poor rooms, washing and scrimping, with never a penny to spare for movies or a downtown dinner.

Cassy knew herself to be a person born without the need of a sense of caste; Dan was acutely conscious of social distinctions. He had ambitions far above the plain folk, the laborers, and the derelicts of Mrs. Harney's house. Cassy thought them merely amusing. If one couldn't be a Pringle, at the top of the heap, it didn't matter much how far one descended among the ungraded ranks below.

A mansard flat on Shotwell Street was just as good to Cassy as an apartment on McAllister or Pine. There were only two distinctions socially: one was either in society, and went to teas that were reported faithfully in the papers, and knew the members of the best Peninsula clubs, or one wasn't significant in any way.

But Dan was chafed by the consciousness of intermediate stages. He wanted to take a modern flat, nearer downtown, and perhaps make a first payment on a car. He wanted to go out occasionally, to have a home to which he could bring his friends.

They loved each other wholly, deeply, ecstatically. The completeness of her absorption in Dan, and his in her, wiped away all the past, for Cassy, and made her entirely indifferent to the future. There was nothing, nowadays, but the heavenly present, and the dreaming summer streets of the Mission, and the shops where she bought kitchen soap and apricots, and where she stopped under the awnings to talk to Italians about ice, and bootblacks about new laces for Dan's big shoes.

She was Mrs. Wallace—Mrs. Wallace—Mrs. Wallace; she exulted in her married state. It was all right to have this handsome, eager, weary boy come flying up the cluttered stairs of the old Cannon house every night and catch her in his arms: they were man and wife. She heated a kettleful of water for his shaving in the morning; she knew every one of his neckties and shirts. She knew what dishes he especially liked and that he thought *The Count of Monte Cristo* the greatest book that ever had been written.

And in return he grew familiar with all the sweetness and absurdity, the wisdom and inconsistency, the childishness and sagacity that were Cassy; he laughed at her domestic makeshifts, he loved the blue apron, he wasn't so crazy about the brown one. Dan had a dozen pet names for her, and she loved them all, loved to be his baby, and his honey, and his kid, and "Cashie" and "Snooks." They lived in a world of their own, entirely shut away by their love and their happiness from the outside world.

One day a small trunk arrived for young Mrs. Wallace, and Cassy thankfully discovered within it much of her old clothing—not all, but enough at least to make her feel well dressed again. There was no message, there never had been any message from her mother or father or Gertrude.

No matter! They existed now only as half-forgotten dreams.

In October heavy rains began, and Cassy's little domain became cold. There was no heat in the house, and while the weather was still warm the continued damp affected the roof, the thin walls and floor, and by the second day of it Cassy and Ruth Terry were talking as desperately as if they had never seen the sun.

The docks were deserted, no ships were in, and Dan had settled down determinedly to the business of finding a permanent job.

But it was hard, in the pouring rain. He came home night after night wet and discouraged, and as rent day, the deadly seventeenth, came nearer and nearer, Cassy felt her first qualms of real uneasiness.

"However, it's Sunday, so that gives us one more day's reprieve," she reminded him hardily. "Nobody is expected to pay rent on a Sunday!"

"I know it!" he said desperately, nervously. On the Monday evening, when he came home filled with uncomfortable apprehension, and still without a penny or a job, it was amazing to find the table set neatly about a jar of blue daisies, and the heartening odor of pot roast, his favorite dinner, scenting the room.

Cassy was mysterious and demure.

"And mocha cakes to follow," she said modestly.

"What's happened, in the name of Allah?"

"How do you mean 'what's happened?'"

"Has your father dropped dead?"

"Not—Dan, aren't you awful!—not that I know of. Oh, and I paid the rent," Cassy added, yawning elaborately, patting her mouth with the back of her hand.

"You what!"

"It was due yesterday, dear. So I paid it this morning."

"You've bartered what is more precious than life itself to any good woman, then?" Dan suggested.

"Dan, is that a nice way to talk to your wife?"

"Well, spill it—spill it, honey!" he pleaded, resting his tired, cold face against her warm little apron and locking a big wet arm about her.

"Well, I just—concentrated," Cassy explained complacently, "and then I walked about staring at things, and then—like a sleep-walker, Dan, I went straight in to your trunk and took out your two chauffeur's liveries and your top coat and put them into my suitcase, and walked over to Moser's with them, and got forty-two dollars for them in five seconds! And, my dear, on top of that, old Moser offered me twenty-five for my fox!"

"You sold your fox!"

"No, I didn't. I just have it in reserve for the next emergency."

"There won't be any next emergency!" Dan told her. His tired, anxious little-boy face was white and set.

"Danny, darling, it breaks me all up to see tears in your eyes!"

"I can't help it."

She was out of his arms again; she called from the kitchen:

"Change those wet shoes and put on your wrapper, and we'll eat!"

After dinner they played double solitaire.

"That's three games running to me, Dan."

"You think you're good, don't you?"

"No, I don't think I'm good. But I know I'm a good deal better than you are!"

"Well, all right, that's fifteen cents to you. Now I'll play you a game, thirty cents or nothing!"

"Oh, Dan, it's eleven!"

"Oh, you crook! You'd sit up until midnight if you were losing!"

Her happy laughter. And then, confidentially, irrepressibly: "Dan, isn't this *fun!*"

Chapter VII

In early December she told him that Ruth Terry was going to have a third baby. Lloydy was not yet two, and Warren barely four, and now there would be a third.

Dan, who disliked the shiftless Terrys, paid no attention. After three or four more days, at a carefully selected moment, she brought up the subject again.

It was a heavenly warm Sunday morning, and the room up in the mansard roof was sweet with sunshine and fragrant moving airs. The Terry babies, below, had been screaming, an hour ago, but now Harry, looking sulky and discontented and trying to read his paper between their onslaughts, had them out in the yard. The O'Briens' Victrola hadn't started yet, and nicely dressed persons were walking slowly through the streets to an accompaniment of jangling church bells.

Cassy had oranges for the late breakfast and had on the brown apron that alternated with the original blue one.

"Ruth thinks she's going to have another baby, Dan."

"Gosh, that's tough!" Dan commented absent-mindedly. He was reading the usual page, with the big pugilist in the middle, who always had his arm crooked and black trunks for his only apparel.

"She was crying her eyes out," Cassy continued in a rather faint voice.

Dan made no comment. He was working regularly now, in a coffee commission house far down on Sansome Street, in the place of a man who had been injured by a falling box. The pay was fair, twenty-five dollars a week, and Cassy secretly hoped that the job would be permanent. Dan sat at a little desk in a pigeonhole, in an alley, and checked outgoing invoices for the trucks. It was not quite manual labor, and it was steadier than work on the docks, which had been a mere temporary expedient, at best.

"That's going to be a good game Saturday," he said. "Gee, I wish we could get a couple of passes!"

"Ruth says that Warren was all right, and even two were all

right," Cassy pursued. "But now, while Lloydy is still so little, she just feels terrible!"

Dan threw aside his paper, passed his coffee cup, and stretched his square shoulders with a great cheerful laugh.

"Who feels terribly about what?" he asked.

"Ruth. But, anyway, they're in debt! Of course, we are, too," Cassy conceded honestly, "but we're getting out. Dan," she went on suddenly, deliberately, not looking at him as she buttered a roll, "I wonder how we'd feel if we were going to have one?"

"I know how I'd feel," Dan said promptly. "I'd take my throat into the kitchen there and cut it!"

"Oh, Dan, why?" Cassy asked, widening her dark eyes reproachfully. "Everyone has them!"

"Yes, I know. But not fixed as we are."

"Well, people don't throw them into the bay!" Cassy argued, out of a silence.

"Throw what into the bay?"

"Babies."

"I'll bet Harry Terry would like to!" Dan said with a chuckle.

"They're cute!" Cassy asserted stubbornly. Her cheeks were suddenly red, and her eyes full of tears.

"Sure they're cute, and when we can take care of them we'll have a bunch of them!"

"And meanwhile?" Cassy demanded, almost angrily, her breath coming a little quickly.

"Well, if I was in Terry's place," Dan said, "I'd have Ruth go to a doctor and have him decide that she couldn't stand it so soon, that he'd have to save her life by cutting the whole thing short."

"Oh, but Dan! Isn't that a terribly wrong thing to do?"

"What's wrong about it?"

"Well—well——" She stopped, puzzled and a little sick. "It seems so unfair," she mused aloud.

"What's unfair about it?"

"Dan, don't take that arguing sort of tone with me!"

"No, but I mean—do you think it's unfair to the baby?"

"Well, yes, in a way. He—he ought to have his little chance! And—and to the mother, too."

"You bet your life Ruth Terry wouldn't think it was unfair!"

"But—but there seems to me to be something so *humiliating* about it," Cassy faltered, her cheeks burning. "To have to go talk to a doctor about getting rid of your baby, and have anæsthetics, and a lot of pain——"

"It isn't half as much trouble, I should think, as going through with it!" Dan argued.

"Oh, no, Dan, that's natural!"

"Well," he said comfortably, looking out of the high window now, into the clear sweet winter sunshine, "don't you worry about Ruth Terry's troubles. You thank the Lord for our luck!"

Cassy said nothing. She busied herself about the Sunday morning house cleaning as usual, and Dan helped her. There were corned-beef hash and a mixed salad, all ready for dinner. Late Michaelmas daisies, from the corner lot, were sturdy and blue in a glass bowl on the forlorn old table.

They were ready to leave at half-past one. Cassy went back to the kitchen, to be sure no gas bead was burning, and shut the door that connected her little culinary department with the big room, and leaned against it, faint with misery.

The smell of the sink, the smell of the hash, the smell of the coffee pot on the window sill, and of the wet dish towel that was spread on the inverted dishpan, all assailed her weakness and desolateness like so many physical blows.

Her mouth was filled with salt water; she looked at the soda box and thought that she would take a half spoonful. Sometimes it helped. But sometimes it made matters worse. It would be too terrible to be sick in the park, with Dan.

She went out to the stairs and joined him.

"You look kind of white, Cass."

"I don't know—I feel rather rotten to-day."

"Corned beef last night, maybe. Or maybe the cabbage!"

The words alone made waves of nausea sweep over her. She had touched neither food, but he had not noticed it. Of late her dinners had been largely composed of much hot milk and a little toast.

"Maybe." She swallowed. The bright Sunday morning streets, the moving motor cars and loaded trolleys swam before her.

"Christmas three weeks from to-day, and it's *hot!*" Dan rejoiced.

"It may be just your imagination—it may be just your imagination," Cassy's mind kept saying over and over.

She watched him furtively all day. He was so boyishly happy, in his shabby suit, so wistfully, fearfully anxious to have everything go right, to have their daring adventure turn into a success.

Late in the afternoon they decided to try dinner in a new place; a perfectly marvelous place. Dan and Cassy couldn't figure out how they could serve such a good meal for the price. The hot food heartened her, and she felt well afterward and more like herself. She indulged in a little dream, as they rode home on the street car to the black darkness of Shotwell Street, a dream in which this new fear vanished and everything was as it had been a month or two before, when she had been so physically adequate to the demands of each new day, and so confident of the future.

But the next morning brought the now familiar miseries again, and Cassy dragged through an endless, dull, cool, sunless day in utter despair.

Finally, she told Ruth Terry, or rather Ruth told her, of the situation.

"Sure, I knew it weeks ago," Ruth said, in her hard, commiserating, philosophical young voice.

"But, Ruth, are you sure?" Cassy faltered, quavering. For until this instant, as she realized now for the first time, she had secretly hoped that her experienced neighbor would tell her that she was mistaken.

"Well, what do you think!" Ruth exclaimed, with a sensible surprise.

"Dan will be wild!" Cassy murmured.

"Of course he will. They always are. But they go perfectly crazy over the babies!" Ruth said unemotionally.

"It isn't fair," the younger wife said stubbornly, staring into space with bright dry eyes.

"No, it's not fair. But there you are!—Lloydy, if I catch you doing that again," Mrs. Terry said violently to her latest born as she jerked him away from the table, "I'll give it to you good!"

At Ruth's suggestion the two women, wheeling Lloydy in the perambulator from which he was soon to be ousted, and with Warren whining and naughty at their heels, walked up Valencia Street that same afternoon to see Doctor von Ampt.

They had to wait in a regulation flat parlor, streaming with sun and flies, and with many other women waiting, for almost an hour, during which time Lloyd and Warren were extremely restless. After that they all went into an inner office, and a weary, business-like man in a dirty white uniform talked to them briskly.

Cassy came home broken. It was about four o'clock when she returned to her own big room, tossed her bundles upon the sink boards, and collapsed upon the bed.

The room was cold; she struggled with the bedclothes, trying to cover herself without making the effort of getting up. Her garments felt frightfully uncomfortable on her, she kicked off her shoes and huddled wretchedly against the pillows, sometimes panting in sheer physical discomfort, sometimes trying to think.

"Oh, I'm so co-o-old! Oh, darn that five o'clock whistle!" she presently said aloud.

This time last year she had not known Dan. Or, no, this was just about the time he had come to Papa for a job.

"I wish that every month, since Papa first gave me my allowance, I had put fifty dollars into the bank. I'd have it, now."

Perfumes and silk stockings and sealing wax. Strange things to buy!

"Gosh, I am cold! I hate this kind of a gloomy, heavy day."

She remembered the doctor again, and her face burned, and her hands were icy. A comfortable man; it was nothing to him.

There was no question about Mrs. Wallace's condition, and he did not know any way out of it. It would be extremely dangerous. He never advised it.

It was like a nightmare! She had supposed her fears sufficiently definite before this. But this was no longer fear: it was terrible certainty.

"I'm going to have a baby. In June."

Bella Wilfer, indeed, and her little ship upon the river, bearing to her and to John a little baby! Dickens was a man; he *would* write drivel like that. What would Bella have done if John had met this romantic confession with a threat to take his throat into the kitchen and cut it!

Cassy dragged herself up and staggered dizzily about dinner preparations.

She had made up her mind to tell Dan on New Year's Day, but, as it happened, they had the talk a week earlier, on their first Christmas together.

The feast fell on Monday and the day broke hot and sticky. Cassy and Dan had made a full, happy day of Sunday and had come home tired and late on Sunday evening, determined to sleep until noon the next day.

But Cassy had not been able to sleep at all. Racked by discomfort of mind and body, cramped by the necessity of not disturbing Dan with her restlessness, hungry, cold, and weary, she counted the long hours until the winter dawn and lay reluctantly still, until nine, until ten, until at last Dan wakened at eleven o'clock.

They exchanged presents, exchanged exclamations of amazement. How had Dan—how had Cassy—been able to afford anything so wonderful? Dan sat down, ravenous and happy, to coffee and eggs; Cassy made herself try to eat.

The room was littered with tissue paper and ribbons, for they had made each other a dozen little silly presents apiece that had cost almost nothing. Cassy looked at the litter apathetically. She could not—she *could* not clear it up; she could not wash these loathsome cups and eggy plates.

Oh, if they could only go back, just a few months, to the time

when all this had been such fun, when she could hardly keep her feet on the ground for sheer vitality and high spirits! She had loved it so, planning and cooking and bargaining in the sunny morning markets!

"No, but do you really like your present, Cass?"

"Like it! I adore it."

"And can you use it?"

"Use it? I'll use it every day!"

"You looked sort of serious."

"I'm all right!" She went into the kitchen and wiped her flooded eyes on a dish towel. Christmas Day. The streets were alive with churchgoing persons, laughing and panting in the clear heat, and with children intoxicated with kiddy cars, scooters, coasters, and dolls.

At one o'clock they went out, and presently wandered into a big church that had emptied of worshipers, but where the sweetness of incense still lingered, and the air was threaded with mighty organ notes. It had been Dan's suggestion, but it was Cassy who found sudden peace and balm in the big quiet place, her ears deadened with music, her heart and mind apparently dulled as well by some restful sweetness in the darkened arches and vaults.

Idly roaming forth again, they met the Archers, a brisk, materially prosperous couple who were business acquaintances of Dan's, and the Archers insisted upon the Wallaces accompanying them upon a Sunday run and dining with them.

"How about lunch?" the Archers asked.

They had just got up from the table; Cassy and Dan said that they too had just breakfasted. Cassy did not add that her breakfast had been unfortunate and that she had been sick afterward.

Dan sat on the front seat with Billy Archer, and Cassy in the back with Mabel. Mabel had her dear little bright-faced Pekinese with her and talked a good deal about beauty parlors, permanents, and bridge games. She played bridge with seven other "girls," and once a year each member entertained the whole club and all the husbands at an evening party. The girls also went to

a matinée once a month; they liked the Orpheum, or a good picture. They got reserved seats 'way in advance.

"You probably prefer Shoo-fly to a baby!" Cassy thought contemptuously, looking at the Peke. And she despised and envied fortunate, healthy, hungry Mabel.

They went out to the beach, and down the Half Moon Bay road, and that was nice. But then they went too far and were caught in a maze of traffic, far down south of the cemeteries. Billy Archer said that he knew a fine place to dine, near Palo Alto, and they could go there. It was now five o'clock.

In Burlingame, and in the Hillsborough district, where each beautiful home stood far back from the road, bowered in magnificent trees, some young girls and men were riding, pretty, graceful figures, erect on horseback.

They would go home to big quiet rooms, and books, and delicious dinners . . .

Cassy was starving. She could not understand how Dan could be so gay, on the front seat, perfectly willing to drive on and on interminably, when every mile was taking them farther away from her restful bed and from the privacy of her own room. He kept turning about to beam at her enthusiastically.

Her feet were very cold. It was getting dark, and the motor lamps flashed regularly in her face from the northbound traffic. Flash—zoom—flash—zoom—honk.

They stopped at a restaurant, and it was packed. No hope here, but if the gentleman would come back in an hour they would hold a table.

They went on to another. Packed. All right, then, they'd telephone and go back to the city to Pierre's.

At exactly eight o'clock they found themselves comfortably settled at Pierre's, with a delicious dinner all ready. Cassy by this time was desperate with hunger and weakness and cold. She determined to eat everything, recklessly, clams, chicken, richly fried potatoes with cheese, salad, and Pierre's own specialty, the heavy, rum-flavored hot egg sauce called "zambioni." But she barely tasted the food when it came.

The hospitable Archers wanted to go up to their own flat afterward, but Dan explained that to-morrow was the first day on a new job, and he and Cassy got onto a crosstown car.

Immediately she was very ill, and they had to get off again. They walked wretchedly for awhile, Cassy clinging tightly to Dan's arm, and after some blocks she said she felt better.

"It was something you ate."

"I suppose so. And waiting so long for dinner and getting so cold."

"Feel well enough to get on another car?"

"We could try it. But let's—let's walk just a little more."

"You don't think a glass of cold orangeade——?"

"Oh. Dan. *Please*——"

She wavered feebly against him in the street. It was all a nightmare, getting into the car, and having a fat man give her his seat, and wondering if she were going to be sick again.

Nightmare. She was walking from the car to the house, and going up through the garden, and hearing Victrolas, and shouts, and children crying, and the young Terrys, in the big, smelly house. What a world of smells it was!

Cassy got into her own room and dropped her purse, her fur, her hat in the centre of the floor. She was conscious of nothing but exhaustion and cold, her teeth chattered. She reached blindly for her nightwear, slipped into it, rolled into bed, and pulled the covering over her.

It was very cold. Christmas night might well be cold, but the day had been hot. Her teeth chattered, and Dan, who had been fumbling about vaguely, pale with concern and sympathy, came to touch her hands.

"You're freezing!"

"Doesn't it seem cold to you?"

"Not so very."

"But don't look so scared, Danny!"

She laughed frantically, her teeth chattering. He drew a chair to the side of the bed and sat there, looking at her sympathetically.

"Anything I could do for you, Cass?"

"Just—get me warm! It seems to me that I have never been warm in my whole life!"

"You'll warm up." He was not thinking of what he was saying, and she looked at him in surprise. Suddenly, in an odd tone, he began, "Cass——"

She looked at him, turning over to lie on her back, her face flushed, her hands icy, and her head rocking.

"Cass," he said, clearing his throat. "Have you thought—you know, that this might be something else?"

Instant response leaped into her eyes, her heart beat fast. She regarded him steadily, not moving a muscle.

"You know—it might be that," Dan suggested, watching her face.

Cassy swallowed with a dry throat and patted his hand.

"It is, Dan," she said, with a little effort.

"How d'you know?" he asked quickly.

"I asked a doctor. Ruth's doctor."

"And he said——?"

"—Said there's no mistake about it."

"He—— What do you know about that?" Dan stammered, his wistful boy's face lighted by bewilderment and surprise. "You poor kid," he added a little timidly, a little awkwardly.

Cassy's cold fingers continued to cling tightly to his hand; she watched him anxiously.

"Isn't there some way to—get out of it, Cass?" Dan asked presently, rather awkwardly and doubtfully.

Her pale face grew whiter, and gripping his hand, with sudden fear and entreaty in her voice she said:

"Dan, I won't! That's what Ruth said. And at first—knowing how things are with us——

"But, Dan," she hurried on urgently, after an instant's pause, "it means—no, I couldn't do that! A hospital, and nurses, and anesthetics——"

Suddenly her lips were shaking and her face bathed in tears.

"To—to get out of something because we were afraid of it——" she faltered.

"Well, gosh," Dan began, tears in his own anxious blue eyes, "I'd only be sorry if *you*—it'd be up to *you*——"

He floundered.

"You take darn good care of me," he added a little thickly, after a pause. "I don't see why you couldn't take care of a couple of us little fellers."

Suddenly she was sitting up, her thin arm tightly about him, her wet cheek pressed against his. They spoke with long hesitations between phrases.

"Dan, if I thought you didn't mind!"

"Well, I don't think it's up to *me* to mind!"

"But if I thought you didn't mind——"

"Cassy, don't cry!"

"I can't help it!"

"But, listen. It means an awful lot of work for you."

"I'll love it!" she laughed, through bitter tears.

"Hell, everyone else manages it," Dan said, in a strong voice.

"I know!" Cassy stammered, still laughing and crying. "Dan," she said exhaustedly, lying back on the pillows, "I couldn't have them talking, there at the clinic, as if it was just a stupid pest and a bore, and we were to blame for getting into it, and they—they—with their clean white uniforms and their antiseptic hands, had to get us out of it! It seems to belong to us, Dan. And I belong to myself! I'm not an animal for them to pity and cut to pieces."

"Let's keep away from them!" Dan said hotly and proudly.

"Oh——" Cassy breathed, on a long, tired, contented sigh, lying back luxuriously, but her fingers still holding his. "I shan't mind anything, now that you know and don't care! I'll be all right, you'll see. I've been worrying so, and trying to keep up, but now I'm all right. Oh, Danny, what a relief!"

"You're freezing!"

"I'll warm up now."

"I wonder . . ."

He left the bedside and began to gather her scattered things

and put them away. Cassy, shuddering as she watched him, more than once caught the puzzled look in his eyes.

"Isn't it the darnedest thing to think of us with a kid!" he said two or three times. And once he laughed shortly as he said it.

Suddenly he left the room, and Cassy sat up and drew the overcoat he had thrown on the foot of the bed over her other bed covers. The shivering went on. She wondered if she had ever been warm.

"Half-past ten," she thought, looking at the alarm clock. "Danny'll come to bed soon, and then maybe I'll get warm!"

Ten minutes—fifteen, elapsed before Dan came back. When he did appear, it was with a kerosene stove dangling from one hand and an oil can from the other. A long, flat box, wrapped and tied, was under his arm.

"Oh, Danny," Cassy said eagerly. "What an inspiration! Oh, now we'll be all right!"

He set the stove down, filled it, scratched a match. Upon the discolored ceiling a disk of heartening orange light appeared, the heavy bitter cold air began to retreat to the corners of the room.

"There!" He wiped his hands and went into the kitchen. Cassy heard the old water faucet rasping into the empty kettle. She thought that perhaps when he was asleep she could creep out there and make herself a cupful of hot milk.

"What are you doing out there, Danny?"

"Never you mind what I'm doing!"

He put his head through the half-open door.

"Could you do a cup of tea?"

Every fibre of her half-frozen being stirred.

"Oh, Dan, of all things in the world I'd adore it!"

"And here's your new hot-water bag, Mrs. Wallace."

"Dan Wallace!"

"Mum?"

"Did you go out to the drug store at this hour of night?"

"I did." The heavenly incredible hotness of it was at her feet, her whole body shook with the ecstasy of returning comfort. The

heat went through her in great waves. "Here you are," Dan said, coming in warily with a little board, held steadily, as a tray. Upon it were the teapot, the cream bottle, the sugar, and a shaggy heap of amateur toast. "It's one of the shelves, I just lifted it out," Dan explained, of the tray.

Her feet on the hot water bottle, her thick wrapper about her shoulders, Cassy sat up against the pillows to enjoy the most delicious food she had ever tasted in the world. Warmth penetrated her whole hungry, cold, exhausted being, color came back into her brown, thin cheeks, and light and laughter into her eyes.

Presently they were both laughing. The kerosene stove, borrowed from Mrs. Harney, burned cheerfully, and an agreeable warmth and the delicate smell of hot oil permeated the room. Cassy, hunger, cold, fear, and fatigue alike banished, finished her third full cup of weak, delicious tea, emptied the toast plate of all but crumbs, and afterward lay in a state of utter satisfaction, watching Dan's clumsy efforts to reduce the apartment to order.

"Oh, Dan, I'm so glad you know!"

"I was thinking, walking to the drug store—" he hesitated—"you know, I'm crazy about kids," he offered briefly.

Her eyes shone with utter joy.

"Oh, but so am I, Dan!" she protested eagerly. "I simply adore them. And to have one of our *own*——"

"Well, that's what I was thinking!"

A silence. Then Cassy said, in a low voice:

"Getting rid of your own baby! That's—that's *badder,* to me, than getting into trouble. And I'm not in trouble," she added, with her own little air of pride, "I'm married."

"There was an awfully cute picture of a kid, powdering himself in the face with a big powder puff, in the drug store," Dan said. "I was looking at it as if I'd never seen a kid before!"

"Dan, I love you so!" Cassy said from her heart. She lay back on the pillows, breathing deeply, her blue eyes fixed in fervent gratitude and adoration on his face, her fingers in his.

"I love you, too, my own girl. God knows I do!"

"You're so big and strong and well, and you're so good to me, Dan!"

"Oh, well, hell, you're good to me, Cass!" he said, embarrassed.

"Do you know—" she was merely thinking aloud; there was a deep smile in her eyes—"do you know that I'm beginning to be terribly happy about this?"

"Well, gosh, sooner or later we had to have a kid!" he agreed.

"No, but I mean terribly *happy,* Dan—not just reconciled! I'm thinking of the shop windows with the little boots and capes in them, and of the bottles, all along in a row on the window sill here, and of the perambulator! We'll—we'll be crazy about our little girl, Dan."

"Where do you get this little girl stuff? Our little boy, you mean."

They both laughed joyfully, exultantly.

"I don't know why I didn't guess before," Dan said.

"I don't know why I let myself get all wrought up! You seem no sooner to get a grip on one problem than you have to face another," Cassy mused.

"If we got a grip on our original problem, I'm the rose of no-man's land," Dan observed, turning out the oil burner.

Cassy's weak, happy laughter rang out again.

She lay awake long after he was asleep that night, but it was a contented wakefulness, filled with new thoughts and new plans. Sharing the secret with Dan had seemed strangely to rob it of half its burden; she need not apologize any more, or ponder any more. A baby was coming to her and to Dan, and it was their own business.

Through her high window, from where she lay in bed, she could see a patch of starry night sky, velvet black, throbbing with points of cold light. One great star looked into the big room under the mansard roof, and Cassy went off to sleep even while she looked back at it.

"Christmas night," she thought drowsily. "And there's my star, to show me the place where the joy of all the world . . ."

Chapter VIII

After Tommy came the Wallaces had to move. It was one thing for Cassy to carry groceries and milk up the three long flights to the mansard roof in the Cannon house, and it was another to lug Tommy and all these other things as well.

Cassy went to a big hospital for her first experience with illness, paying ten dollars a week for a bed in a ward of four, and paying a special nurse for only two days and nights. After that the nurse on the floor took care of her, and although the nurse did not especially like the job, and Cassy did not especially like the nurse, it was only for a short while, and in no time at all Cassy was home with the baby.

Tommy was troublesome, perhaps because his father and mother knew so little about him. But then, for that matter, all the babies in the house were troublesome, and screamed and regurgitated—Cassy got the word from her baby book—and whooped with croup and colic, for the first few months of their lives, anyway.

She had some exhausting weeks with him, when nothing went right, and nights were hideous with worry and interruptions, and then she and Dan moved to an apartment in Fulton Street, and for awhile at least everything went more smoothly.

The new apartment was on the ground floor and had actual sunshine in the kitchen and back bedroom. These rooms looked out upon a cemented yard and two vacant lots. The front rooms, the sitting room with Dan's bed in the wall, and the dining room, were very dark and cold.

Almost two hundred dollars' worth of furniture, second hand, and to be bought in carefully estimated installments, made the place exciting from the start. Tommy had a regular crib, now, instead of a wash basket, and with Dan sleeping in the wall bed and Cassy on the new couch, they all had plenty of room.

There was a four-burner range with an oven here, too, and plenty of hot water, making the cooking and Tommy's essential washing much simpler. Cassy missed her neighbors and her airy

clothes line, but in a way this was nicer living—less public and noisy and cheap, fewer Victrolas and screaming babies and open doors. Indeed, she never saw her neighbors in the big apartment house at all.

The companion flat to her own was occupied by the janitress, a lean, hard-worked woman with many pale, clean blonde children, who were always studying. How eight of them were packed away in those four rooms Cassy often wondered. She presently got on friendly terms with Mrs. Olsen, but the secret of their sleeping arrangements was never disclosed.

On the back porch she could keep the baby's carriage—a second-hand carriage that had cost nine dollars—the brooms, and the garbage pail, and this made room in the kitchen for the little table upon which she and Dan had the first meals in the new quarters—and in the end all their meals. To begin with, they apologized to each other for the informality of it, but presently they were eating there regularly, and the dining room "set" that they were going to buy as soon as the other things were paid for never materialized.

Since Tommy's birth Cassy had been conscious of a deep fatigue. There seemed to be no good reason for it. She had been busy all day long, before Tommy's arrival; she could hardly be more than that, now. Often now, besides, she lay down when Tommy took his nap, and dozed or rested, a thing she had never done in her life before. But just the same she was always tired.

Returning from the hospital, she had felt splendid. Health, energy, love of living had come flowing back into her being, and once again she had been lithe and light, eager to be at home again.

But the first dreadful night, when Tommy had wailed so incessantly and so heartbrokenly, and she and Dan had been perfectly desperate with fear, inexperience, fatigue, and sleep, had ended all that once and for all. From that time on Cassy had been struggling vainly to catch up with herself, always confident that somehow next week—or perhaps to-morrow—all the old vigor would return.

It never did. She never caught up with Tommy, for one thing.

He was a heavy baby, and as soon as he was done with summer colic he began on winter croup. To keep him clean, to keep him fed, to keep him dry was a whole day's work in itself, and it was heart-breaking—back-breaking—spirit-breaking to have him start up hopefully in the middle of the night, too. He had to be washed, the clothes he wore had to be washed, his crib blankets and high chair had to be washed incessantly. Cassy would sit down, when he was busy with his bottle, feeling that her feet were actually ablaze, feeling an absolute stupor of weariness engulfing her. Sometimes for the whole dozen minutes that it took him to finish his meal she sat motionless, staring vaguely into space.

She could not see how other women did it. Some women, like Mrs. Olsen, had six instead of one. Cassy was tired out before the day commenced; she was tired out when she took Tommy to market, at eleven.

Dan had had breakfast and been gone for hours by this time, and Tommy had had breakfast and his bath, and perhaps the beds were made, or perhaps some spasmodic cleaning had been done in the kitchen and a line of wash was out.

While he remained clean and wakeful, for twelve o'clock was his sleepy time, Cassy had to get out. He would be plumped into his carriage, propped with his pillow, tucked under his rather dirty blanket. But she could not, after all this, waste any time on herself. Her coat went on over a draggled kitchen dress, her hat was jammed down without a glance at the mirror, gloves did not matter—her purse—no time for powder or lip red, or any other beautifying . . .

In the streets she slapped her feet down flatly, as she had seen tired nursemaids walking. Flap-flap-flap, and 'round the corner to Cipetti's. Eggs and butter and sugar still so frightfully expensive, and nothing any good without one or all of them in it.

The half pound of butter, the lard, the bread, the carrots, went in at Tommy's feet. The butchers were so cheerful, telling one about the raise in prices! Sure, you couldn't expec' like you would get leev' for nart'ing! The doc now make de seek peepl' eata da leev'.

Her back would ache dully, steadily, all day long. Sometimes at night it kept her awake, aching like a snake winding itself about her. No matter, Tommy would not be a baby forever. They could not have chopped meat again; they could not have frankfurters again. Pork sausage; they would have that. She was so tired.

Afternoons were the worst times. The wind blew hard in the late summer afternoons, and the streets were gritty and dirty. Sometimes Cassy made a great effort and took Tommy to a park, and sat transfixed with weariness on a hard bench, pushing his carriage to and fro. But more often they stayed in the house.

Dan got home at six, to find dinner ready and Tommy in bed. But Tommy was by no means asleep, and Cassy could hardly keep on her feet. Somehow, when Dan got home, she always wanted to cry. She always felt fearful, either that Tommy was going to die and leave her, or that she was going to die and leave Tommy.

Sometimes Dan asked humbly if he could bring the baby out of the bedroom, and for the peace and pleasure of it Cassy always said yes. It was bad for the baby, but these were among the bright spots of her life. Somehow she felt less tired, spilling biscuits onto a plate, and pouring stew into a bowl, when Dan was sitting in his dinner chair, with little tear-streaked, double-gowned Tommy beaming and triumphant on his knees.

She and Dan idolized the baby, and that was part of the trouble, too. Love so deep is half fear, and Cassy's waking and sleeping hours were filled with an agonizing concern for Tommy. They considered him a miracle, and no more thought of comparing other babies to Tommy than they would have thought of comparing Raggedy Ann dolls to him. Cassy's rooted belief that there had never been anything in the world at all like him was so deep that she never analyzed it at all.

Dan would wind his soggy little night wrapper tightly about Tommy's fat knees, and Tommy would grip a firm, fat little hand about each of his father's thumbs, and Cassy would look at the two and marvel. Her man and her boy. The baby was frowning and portentous, like a judge! Danny still wore his anxious, friendly, little-boy look, and always would.

Now and then Dan would stoop and kiss the top of Tommy's head, that soft little furry head that was scented with soap and powder and delicious baby smells of milk and blankets.

"Tired to-night, Cass?" Dan would mumble, almost too tired himself to ask it. And Cassy, putting the cut bread on the table and collapsing into her chair with a sigh, would force herself to answer, "Yep, a little."

"Maybe he'll be good to-night?" Dan might speculate of the baby. And Cassy, who would have him now while Dan ate, would browse a thousand little kisses from his curly head and reproach him, "Tommy, why can't you act like a Christian?"

"Maybe if you kept him awake all day and didn't let him nap?"

"Oh, Dan, we tried that, and it was awful! He went off . . ."

Cassy would go off herself, sitting upright at the table, with her heaped plate before her, and waken a few seconds later with a jump.

"Don't you remember he would go off about four, and wake about ten, and then we couldn't get him off all night?" she would demand.

"Gosh, what did we do with our time before we had him, Cassy?"

"Danny, I often wonder! It doesn't seem as if there ever was any such time."

"We must have just loafed around sleeping and eating."

"Imagine getting into bed, and reading until you felt sleepy, and then turning off the light, knowing that you wouldn't have to get up . . ." Cassy's voice would trail off into nothingness; she would put her head down on the table. "Imagine ever feeling anything *but* sleepy!" she would mutter.

"You know right well that you ought to be in bed, don't you, Thomas Wallace? Don't you know—full—well that no other little boy is sitting up with his parents at this hour? Dan, isn't he perfectly beautiful when he looks at the light that glistening way?"

"Yes, he is. He's perfectly beautiful."

"He is a beautiful boy, and his mummy knows it!"

"He knows everything we say."

"He does, Dan. He was acting terribly to-day, and I began to scold him, and his darling little lips began to tremble—well, it just about broke my heart," said Cassy, blinking and smiling.

"She jumped you, hey?" Dan asked his son.

And as he rested his tired, puzzled face against the baby's smooth rosy one, Cassy would tell herself that Tommy was already the older of the two.

She might begin to gather the dishes in the sink, detour to get Tommy's bottles from the bathroom window sill, and stop to straighten his crib, looking about vaguely for a dry sheet, noting that the clock had stopped, and pausing to wind and set it.

"Oh, dear, if I weren't so tired!"

They were living at an uncomfortable speed now, and the remaining sum of Dan's premarriage debts had not been touched for some months. Cassy still strove desperately to stay within the limits of the enlarged budget, but it was hard, with Tommy's needs—milk, soap, powder, and carriage blankets—incessantly arising like a swarm of midges on all sides.

The new home, preposterous as the comparison with the shabbiness and disorder of the Cannon place had once seemed, gradually developed faults, and more serious faults, of its own. On the long, slow-moving winter afternoons Cassy came to feel that she was shut into a dark box. The kitchen and bedroom faced obliquely southeast and were pleasant enough in morning sunshine. But by noon all the sun was gone, and after that there was nothing but deepening shadow. In the two front rooms, the parlor where Dan's wall bed was, and the room ordinarily intended for a dining room, which the Wallaces had not furnished, and used as a sort of storeroom, there never was any sunshine at all. Cassy shut those doors, after Dan's bed was made, and lived in the two rear rooms.

They were going to get a rug for the bedroom some day; they were going to buy an ice box. Meanwhile they walked upon bare floors, and Cassy kept food in a wire-netting safe on the little

back porch. They were going to get a telephone, too, and then she could order what she wanted every morning, especially when it was raining. But meanwhile she had to go to market every day.

Sometimes she tried to systematize it, tried to write lists and reduce her marketing days to two or three a week. But invariably some unremembered need arose: milk had soured, or flour and cornstarch had given out at once, or the entire meal depended upon the baked potatoes, and for once rice or macaroni or hominy wouldn't do as substitutes.

"Oh, there must be *one* match left in this house!" Cassy would say aloud, in despair. She would rummage frantically, would go into Dan's room to see if he had not left a little packet of them somewhere. Not a match anywhere. She knew none of her neighbors, nor cared to know them. In fact, the house had turned out to be what was sometimes romantically described in the newspapers as a "love nest," and with the beautifully bobbed, manicured, and scented women who sometimes passed her in the entrance hall, Cassy felt that she had nothing in common.

There was none among them from whom she might borrow a match, except possibly Mrs. Olsen. And with a back payment of rent complicating the situation it might be as well not to rouse Mrs. Olsen.

So that meant getting Tommy into his woolies and into his coach, and getting herself into some sort of street gear, and turning the light out under the stew, and faring forth into a dull, quiet, cold, sunless winter afternoon to buy a box of matches.

The need of more money chafed her on all sides. Cassy thought herself coining an idea when she said innocently to Dan that she did not care a bit about money, she never had, anyone could have the money! But it was what the money could buy that mattered so terribly.

Just a little more would have made such a difference! Dan's twenty-five dollars a week was only some ten dollars too little, but every cent of those ten dollars was vital.

Every spoon, saucepan, pot, and dish was handled, washed, put away, taken down and used again, a hundred, hundred times.

The coffee pot, with its little ruff of grounds in the spout, the frying pan, filmed with cool bacon grease, the muffin tins with tiny baked blots of batter between the cups—she knew them all so well! And with them Tommy's bottles, faintly soured, and needing daily boiling, and further cleaning with a handful of bird shot, shaken up and down in soapy suds inside them.

Tommy had a full quart of milk every day, with a pint of boiled, strained barley gruel, sugar, and lime water, mixed into it. The barley had to boil for thirty minutes before being added to the other mixture, after which it was poured into Tommy's six empty, clean, wet bottles, and the bottles corked and ranged on the cold front room window sill. As used, the bottles were heated to blood heat, and Tommy's mother tested their temperature by holding them against her lean brown gypsy cheek.

Sometimes the barley boiled over the pan, and the gas stove had to be thoroughly cleaned. Sometimes the hot mixture broke the bottles, and there was another delay.

But even so, the work did not seem to explain to Cassy her steady backache and fatigue. She thought that if she could only have three days—one day!—of the old rested, vigorous confidence and energy, she could catch up on the accumulated household work, and start even, and hold her own.

It was almost Christmas time, and Tommy was approaching his sixth-monthly anniversary when the answer to this puzzling question suddenly flashed upon her. Cassy was alone in the kitchen with the baby at the time, and she sat down at the kitchen table, and locked her fingers idly before her, and stared into space for a long time, with narrowed eyes and a bitten underlip.

"It just couldn't happen!" she said at last, aloud. "No, no, I didn't mean you, baby," Cassy added, to the child, who looked up startled from the tray of his high chair, upon which his wet, fat middle finger was solemnly pursuing crumbs.

"Well, now," Cassy muttered, again aloud, after another silence, "now we have to *think*."

She felt frightened. It seemed unbelievable that the city was full of serene, complacent women ordering chicken for dinner,

and discussing wall papers and new hats, while she, right in their midst, only a few feet away from them, should be fighting for her very life. Dan helpless, herself helpless, Tommy not yet walking, and another baby on its way. . . .

That night Dan came home in high spirits. Tommy was good-natured too, and shared the before-supper hour in the kitchen cheerfully with his parents.

"You don't seem half as tired as usual, Danny."

"I ought to be! Know what I've been doing all afternoon? I've been hunting a job!"

"Hunting a job! That's the best reason I ever heard," Cassy commented dryly, "for a man coming home happy."

Dan laughed joyfully.

"Just the same, it is!" he said. "Three of us were laid off this morning—the last three they took on. Things have been dull for a long while."

"I know. You said so."

"Well, at last the big hawk lit. Cotter and the new Swede and I were canned. Graham was awfully decent about it. He said to refer to him and all that, but it didn't make any difference—out we walked.

"By George, Cass!" Dan went on, suddenly enthusiastic. "I went wandering along the waterfront, it was about eight o'clock, you know, and there were ships in, and everything waking up and coming to life, and—well, it's been months since I felt so happy. And I thought, 'Hell, why should I slave away in a city for twenty-five a week, when there are beaches and coconuts and oceans—everything!' I thought that you and the kid and I could do it—other people have done it—just pack up and get off somewhere, and strike out for ourselves, and get somewhere with our lives! I'm sick of this stuff we're paying for and never will get paid for, and I'm sick of this city—I want to take a chance somewhere! I'm going to scout around for a few days and see what I can find that isn't their damn office slavery!"

Her heart expanded, and a new-old hope shone in her eyes. Oh, it would be fun to get away, to fare forth into the great wide

world, and dress in cocoa fringe or tapa cloth, and pioneer—and risk the future for a golden present by some tropical sea. . . .

"Or, listen, suppose it was only chicken farming?" Dan asked.

"Oh, Dan, with a yard for Tommy!"

"Sure. And a swing, and a creek . . ."

Cassy thought of the old place in the Napa valley where the Pringles had spent their decorous vacations for forty years. A big square ranch house, fig trees, grapes, acres of apples and prunes and apricots. She and Gertrude had thought it dull enough, as girls, but her ideas of dullness, as well as of several other subjects, had changed. She remembered the Jersey cows now, and the milk house, smelling of scoured tins and wet wood, and the warm white eggs to which the tiny soft chicken feathers clung.

Oh, if Papa would let them live on the Napa ranch! He paid a man seventy-five dollars a month just to feed the stock, and Cassy and Dan would go for nothing, and save him that, and make money for him, too.

This evening, that she had so dreaded, passed in a golden dream for her and Dan. In a new hope and energy, Cassy washed dishes and made stove and sink scrupulously clean, and Tommy, instead of the usual relegation to his dark and lonely crib, was alowed to fall luxuriously asleep in his father's arms.

"Of course, an old ranch in Napa mightn't be your idea of adventure, Dan?"

"But, gosh, don't you see, of course it would? I mean, living in the open, and eating our own fruit and vegetables, and taking a blanket and sleeping out in the fields . . ."

"There's a tenant house there, too."

"A what?"

"Well, we always call it the tenant house. And then there are sheds and barns and stables, and the Rippeys' place—Rippey's the man who takes care of it, and the flowers, and everything. And then there are real woods, Dan—you'd love them."

"What's the chance?" Dan asked flatly, after awhile.

"Of Papa giving it to us? Well, I don't know. They may have forgiven me long ago—he might even pay us the seventy-

five that he pays Rippey, Danny. What I mean is, when he knew how much we love each other——"

She stopped. And into her tired, thin brown face a strange tender expression suddenly appeared.

"When they realize how much we love each other," she resumed, with a smile for him, "then—maybe——

"Why shouldn't Papa be kind to me?" Cassy demanded boldly. "He's my father! Think what Tommy means to *us,* Dan."

"I know."

"And after all, why shouldn't he want us to be happy, Dan?"

"Gee, it would be good to get out on a ranch again. Is it a big place?"

"Three hundred acres."

"And cows, hay?"

"About twenty, there used to be. And, Dan, turkeys, and doves! And at sunset, under those big trees—of course, it's a bare old place, but it's so beautiful."

He could not ask questions fast enough, nor she answer them.

"Ever spend a winter there?"

"No, but we've been up in winter, and that's just as much fun as summer, only different."

"And how'd the rest of the family feel if we got it?"

"Oh, Mamma and Gertrude hate it. They're always begging Papa to sell it."

"We could raise fancy stock."

"Or goats. The Rippeys have two Toggenburg goats."

"We could ship to the city."

"Oh, certainly. Everyone does."

"Cass," Dan said after awhile, with his wistful, anxious smile, "if we're not going to get it, I wish we hadn't thought of it! It's going to be awfully hard to settle down, now, to anything else."

"I have a *feeling* Papa'll send us up there!" Cassy answered, her heart aching with love and pity for him. She put her arms about him and the baby and laid her thin, warm brown cheeks against his.

"I'd be so glad if we could get a break for awhile, Cass! It'd only be temporary, you know."

"Oh, of course. It'd just carry us over this time when I'm not up to much and when Tommy's so small."

No need to allude to her secret fears yet, Cassy thought. In the first place, they might be no more than fears. And in the second, what with the hopeful turn things appeared to be taking, and the new prospect of a change, they would be robbed of their worst terrors anyway. With Tommy tumbling about all day long in the sunshine, and with plenty of fresh fruit and milk and eggs for herself, Cassy knew that she would be restored to health and energy in no time at all and felt herself equal to the task of rearing a dozen babies.

They went late that evening to stand beside Tommy's crib and look down upon the beauty of the sprawled little satin body, the fat little hand holding a woolly lion, the flushed round cheek and moist tangle of fuzzy curls.

"Isn't he gorgeous, Dan?"

"Yes, he honestly is. He's gorgeous."

"Marriage is wonderful," Cassy said, leaning against her husband.

She felt Dan's lips against the top of her head.

"Gosh, I don't see how you can say so, working the way you do, and with things going as they are!"

"Ah, that's the real beauty of it!" Cassy told him, on her own exultant note. "That's what is going to make the better times different from—well, Gertrude's life, or anyone's life, anyone who hasn't had—all this!"

And her gesture, as they came back, blinking and dazzled, to the kitchen lights, included the dreary area behind the house and the dark, upholstered, curtained, cushioned "love nests" above and about them.

Chapter IX

DAN idled about the house happily for a few days, helping Cassy tremendously, and making her wish that they three might be left alone forever, with just enough money for the inexorable butcher and grocer. They talked incessantly of Napa, comparing the restrictions and inconveniences of the dark little flat to the comfort and quiet and "fun," as Cassy once more called it, of living in the country.

On the fourth day Dan went downtown to see about a job, and, as Granny Choate providentially turned up a few minutes later, Cassy determined to leave Tommy, go down to see her father, and put the question of the Napa ranch to the test immediately.

Granny was a bowed, emaciated, weak-witted old woman who had appeared at Cassy's kitchen door some months earlier, sick with hunger and cold. With a natural quick impulse of charity the younger woman had instantly placed before her old guest the meal she had just prepared for herself, watching the omelette and the tea disappear with great satisfaction. After that Granny came about twice a week, and Cassy fed her.

She suspected that the woman had run away from some poorhouse; anyway, she was a friendly old thing and appeared to know a good deal about babies. Tommy loved her instantly, and Cassy felt no hesitation in leaving him with her for short intervals. Tommy enthusiastically jammed his soft little rosy face against Granny's and covered the leathery old cheeks with his soft, shapeless kisses, in welcome. Cassy dressed herself carefully, trembling a little with excitement and fear and hope, kissed the baby goodbye, and started for the downtown car with one desperate prayer moving her through the afternoon quiet of the winter street, like a figure in a dream.

At half-past five, when Dan came home, she was back in the kitchen, back in her old blue dress, frying chops. Granny was gone, and Tommy, on his back, in his crib, was watching the world of the kitchen through its bars.

"I moved his crib out here, that bedroom's like an ice box; they had some trouble with the furnace," Cassy said, raising a flushed cheek for a kiss. "Sit down, darling, you look dead. Any luck?"

"He took my name," Dan answered, hanging up his overcoat. He bent over the baby. "Are you a guzzler?" he asked.

Tommy became audible as he drank, and waved a leg. Immediately he hurled the empty bottle to the floor and began to struggle to a sitting position.

"Leave him alone as long as he's good," Cassy said in an undertone. "Well, Dan, we're a country family!" she burst out, unable to keep silent any longer.

Dan looked at her sharply and observed the presence of something new, something thrilling, in her manner. His own pulses quickened, and with a sudden brightening of his wistful face he asked eagerly:

"What d'you mean, Cass?"

"I went to see Papa."

"You didn't."

"I did. I was there an hour!"

"Take the kid?"

"No, Granny was here. Yes, I went down, and walked into the office, and asked if he was in, and old Watson said, 'Just a minute, Miss Catherine,' as if I'd been there yesterday."

"My God!" Dan whispered, staring.

"Well, you can imagine the way my heart was beating. So anyway, after a minute Watson came back and said, 'Will you go right in?' I couldn't believe my ears, Dan. I went through the swing door and into the inner office—old Mr. Jessop, Macallister Jessop's father, you know?—was there, but he went right out, and there was Papa, sitting at his desk and looking—well, about seven hundred! So I sort of walked toward him and kissed him—I didn't see why I shouldn't—and he said, 'Sit down, Cassy,' just in his usual way, and we talked along as quietly as you ever saw. So then I sprung the Napa idea on him——

"Oh, but first," Cassy interrupted herself, scattering cornstarch in the mutton fat and browning it, "first I asked about

Mamma, and he said she was all right, only she'd been sort of sick after I went away, and, my dear, Gert's in Europe! What do you think of that?

"Papa asked me if I had left you, and I couldn't help laughing, and I said, no, that I couldn't leave you now, that I had a baby to worry about, and of course I began to cry, and I told him how we loved each other, and how happy we'd been."

Dan got up and kissed her, and she brushed her tears against his shoulder and went on.

"So he said, 'Isn't that the suit you were wearing two years ago, Cassy?' Wouldn't you leave it to Papa to notice that! And of course I said it was, but I said 'Happiness doesn't depend much on clothes, Papa.' And then he said, sort of—well, reluctantly, you know, that I looked all right, and my dear, then I sprung Tommy's name on him—Thomas Leroy, and I think that made a hit. So then I came right out about Napa, and I said we were having troubles, and that we'd work like dogs up there, and that I just couldn't eat or sleep for thinking of how I loved the old place, and what it'd mean to go back—and here I was crying and gesticulating, and he interrupted me—— You know, when all's said and done," Cassy interrupted herself to say explanatorily, "Papa isn't exactly passion's playground, and he said, in the deadest fish voice you ever heard, 'Why, I've no objection in the world to you and Wallace going up there if you want to. It'd probably be a good thing for the old house. Rippey's dead, and his daughter's married, and there are some Japs on the upper ranch, but I'll instruct them that you want eggs and milk and so on. The fruit's been going to waste for a couple of seasons'——"

"What!" Dan shouted.

"Honestly, Dan!"

The baby broke into frightened tears as his young parents performed a mad dance in the crowded kitchen.

"Oh, darling—darling!" Cassy apologized to him, catching him up and holding his wet little cheeks against her own. "You

mustn't cry! Your troubles are over. You're going to be a little country gentleman!"

"Cassy," Dan said solemnly, a few minutes later, over his chops and country gravy, "it looks like the break, old girl. I don't believe things will ever be so hard again."

She looked about the dingy little kitchen, she thought of the three other dark rooms, the hateful things that were not paid for, the many other things they had not been able to buy. She thought of the rainy days when the cemented back yard dripped water—water—water—through the long, lonely hours, and of Tommy's croupy nights and colicky late afternoons, and of Dan coming home tired and discouraged and puzzled, and her bright dark gypsy eyes filled with tears again.

"We'll never love each other any harder than we have in the last two years, Danny."

"I don't know why not. There isn't going to be any luck in this world for us without each other," Dan answered seriously.

They moved on a hot, still Saturday, the first of March, and to Cassy and Dan it was one of those times in life that are filled with the complete joy of living.

The weather was exquisite; it was a singing, throbbing, sweet-scented spring day that thrilled even the foggy city into beauty and fragrance and that had turned the countryside into a fairyland.

At eight o'clock the Wallaces resigned the key of the Fulton Street flat into the hands of one of the pale blonde Olsens, and a few minutes later they were on a ferry car. Dan carried two gorged suitcases—those same suitcases that had made the trip from the Pringle house to the Dresden Hotel a short two years earlier—and Cassy carried the caped and bonneted and interested baby.

They sat outside on the car, and that was delicious in the hot, sweet morning. And then they were at the ferry, and Dan was buying tickets for the Monticello boat, and Cassy could hardly contain herself for happiness. The dark little kitchen, the

cemented yard, the black empty dining room were forever behind her; she never had to see them again! Instead, here she was on the beautiful blue bay, with her husband and son, travelling in the delicious warm morning sunshine.

The fresh air from the water blew her gypsy color back into her face; she sat on the upper deck with Tommy and rejoiced that life could be so sweet.

"Our stuff's on board," Dan reported, coming up from the automobile deck.

"Did you see it?"

"Yep. The crib, with the wash-boiler inside it, and the trunks. Something's leaking out of the grocery box—it looks like blood. We'll probably be arrested at Vallejo."

"It's the corn syrup, I guess."

"How's the country gentleman?"

"Well, he's just been sitting here like an angel—I never saw him so good! He must be getting hungry now—it's almost time for his b-o-t-t-l-e."

"I was thinking we'd better stop in Napa, Cass. I have to see about baggage there, and so on, anyway, and maybe we could get some lunch."

"Maybe that'd be a good idea, Danny. Then we won't have to hurry unpacking when we get out to the ranch."

"That's what I was thinking."

"Imagine getting up to-morrow, Dan, and having breakfast, and just fussing round."

"Gee, Cass, it seems to me we've waited a long time for a little fun!"

"Well, I don't know. Two years isn't so long."

"But I was working five years before that! I was working more than that. I've been working since I ducked school—it's nearer ten years."

"You know, that's the one thought that's been kind of worrying me, Danny, as I've been sitting here thinking."

"What has?"

"Well, that you're such a restless person, Dan, always think-

ing about palm groves and breadfruit and copra and goodness knows what! Napa's an awfully quiet place, you know—at least, I imagine it is, for Gert and I never did much but knock it and sit around on the porch when it was hot, waiting for the ice man. We never knew the people in town very much."

"Why, how do you get that way?" Dan demanded. "I'm going to be perfectly wild about it!"

"I hope you will. But it may strike you as terribly dull."

"What? With you and Tommy and Peter and little Arabella?"

"Well, if I really thought you'd be happy . . ." Cassy submitted, smiling her dewy smile at him and willing to be convinced.

"Happy? I'll be cuckoo! And if I'm not," Dan added illogically, "why, we'll do something else!"

"Ah, yes, we can always do something else!"

Tommy placidly took his bottle, on the trolley leaving Vallejo, and Cassy and Dan looked at the widening beauty of the landscape with appreciative eyes. Poppies were blooming in the lush young grass, and at the fence posts tall buttercups stood swaying on their frail stems. The old farmhouses along the road were framed in lilac and mock orange; acacia trees were tasseled in pure gold. Cassy heard the meadow larks, rising straight up into warmth and sweetness, and the poignant beauty of their cry pierced her heart. Not but what she had heard meadow larks before, all her life long, but somehow spring and larks and buttercups seemed different this year, she had new values; her shoulder was touching the shabby sleeve of Dan's one respectable suit, and in her arms was the soft sleeping lump of babyhood that had changed all the world for her.

Cloud shadows moved over the prosperous meadows and lay mellow on the sloping high roofs of the hay barns. Whistles from invisible factories shrilled noon, and oaks threw symmetrical circles of lacy shade upon the sprouting alfalfa. The trolley car hummed merrily along between the poppies and the waves of wheat. The day grew hot.

That afternoon such farmers, or such idly driving women as had occasion to pass the old Pringle place, noted that it was occu-

pied again. The farmhouse stood high upon an airy knoll strewn with great oaks, and further overrun with planted trees—poplars, willows, peppers. It was in full view of the road, and its hospitably opened front doorway was not a hundred feet from the old-fashioned arched garden gate.

Within this garden, this afternoon, a hundred activities stirred. Boxes and furniture and trunks arrived and were carried indoors; armfuls of rubbish were carried out. A squarely built man started a big bonfire; a slender woman with a baby on her hip watched it burn.

The man was seen carrying in firewood, the woman gathering bridal wreath and border pinks in the long-neglected garden.

When the cool spring dusk came down, all three of the newcomers, man, woman, and baby, were at the back paddock fence for awhile, leaning on the bars, looking toward the west, and the light that was spread in long lances over the hills silhouetted them in gold.

Then they all went in at the kitchen door, and closed it behind them, and after that a golden yellow light bloomed in the windows of the big kitchen, and animated shadows moved to and fro between it and the windows. Smoke presently rose straight and gray into the dimming light of the long spring day, and after awhile more lights bloomed, upstairs this time, and the lower floor was dark.

Then all the lights were gone, and the kindly moon looked down on the old-fashioned peaked roof of the Pringle house and shone in through the uncurtained windows where slept the three happiest persons in all the world that night.

Chapter X

A WOMAN only a few hundred feet away had watched all the day's events and had watched the lights at night. For the Varney ranch faced the Pringle place across only the intervening road, one farm stretching as far away to the north as the other did to the south. Both homesteads had been built close to the highway, and both were set in the same old trees, with gardens hedged in rusty evergreens. The Pringle farm was on higher ground, rising into foothills; the Varney ranch sloped downward, but the lines of barns, outhouses, chicken sheds, and fences were almost the same.

The watching woman was a blonde, with high color; her head was wrapped snugly in braids of gold; she was not tall, but compact and well made. Her eyes were restless and dissatisfied, her mouth bore witness, in its full, protruding red line, to the Spanish ancestors who had bequeathed her her nature.

Besides servants, her only companion in the luxurious farmhouse, to which every imaginable improvement and beauty had been added, was a white-headed man of sixty-five, his age almost doubling hers. For Dulce Varney was but thirty-five.

"People in the Pringle place, Lou," she said to-night.

"That so?"

"Yep. Someone in the post office was telling me to-day that it's Cassy Pringle and her husband, come up here to live."

"She's the pretty little one, dark as a gypsy?"

"Yep. That's Cassy."

"She's a pretty little thing—pretty little foot," said the old man.

"She was—awfully pretty. But she looks dragged out, now."

"She run away with a handsome scamp, didn't she?"

"That's the one. I don't know that I'd call him handsome, exactly," Dulce Varney added thoughtfully. She was still standing by the window, looking out into the moonlight, across to the darkened Pringle house. She gave a brief cryptic laugh.

"I don't know that I ever saw a man who looked exactly like him," she said presently.

A chocolate cake. She would have the Chinese cook make a big, luscious chocolate cake to-morrow morning and walk across the road with it herself at about noon. Everybody liked chocolate cake.

"I don't know whether you remember me. I was Dulce Morado, and then Mrs. Place? I've been a neighbor of yours for more than a year now—Mr. Varney and I were married more than a year ago. Indeed, I remember Cassy Pringle, but I don't believe I've met Mr. Wallace. . . ."

The Wallaces used to discuss the Varneys with inexhaustible interest in a situation so entirely different from their own. The Varneys had plenty of money—the Morados were an old Spanish family of the county, and Dulce's first husband, Frank Place, who had been drowned in the swift-flowing Russian River, had left her money, too.

But that did not arouse any envy in either Dan or Cassy. Their own life was far too absorbing, too satisfying, for that. Out of its fullness and completeness they could spare for the Varneys only a sort of pity.

To Cassy the long, wonderful summer, with its flowers and its fruit, the little chickens pecking in the dooryard, the calves bellowing from the corral, was an unending triumph. The comfortable, ugly old house was a joy to her; it was home. No day was too long for Cassy now, and no day without its unexpected delights to fill the cup to overflowing.

Tommy flourished, and she herself bloomed into the peculiarly touching and delicate beauty that comes only to women who are facing the black shadows, the blinding white light of motherhood. Every meal was a great occasion; Cassy wandered about the old buildings and through the shady lanes of the old ranch in deep content, gathering flowers, gathering berries, gathering a hundred happy, idle memories to enrich the life that was to be.

Tommy could toddle beside her now, and old Granny Choate

a permanent member of the household now could be left alone to putter with dishes and beds.

Dan played with ranching for a few weeks and then got himself a job in the garage in town. After that the Wallaces had a disreputable stripped old car in which to cruise over the countryside, and on many a hot, moon-washed evening the watching eyes of an old man's wife, across the road, would see them return at ten o'clock, eleven o'clock, their picnic basket emptied, their weary baby asleep in his father's arms. Dulce would hear their giddy, irrepressible laughter as they entered their dark house, and it would squeeze her heart like tight fingers.

On the occasion when Cassy, breathless and scandalized, was rushed to a country hospital just in time to welcome a fat little laughing scrap of girl-babyhood, Dulce made frequent opportunities to cross the road and chat, in a friendly, informal manner, with Dan.

He and Granny and Tommy managed as best they could without Cassy, but little things constantly went awry, and Dulce had a happy faculty of discerning and curing them. She was above all things a soothing woman, only anxious that everything should go right.

So she brought over sheets of biscuits, and fat roasted chickens, and Tommy and Granny and Dan fared well, if untidily and irregularly, during the ten days that Cassy was gone.

"Have you ever thought of managing your own garage, Dan?" Mrs. Varney asked him.

"Takes capital," Dan answered briefly, absorbed in cleaning his engine.

"Not so very much."

"I know. But we've had tough going, you know—will you push up that feed?—Thanks.—Cassy's been sick, and hospital, and everything else," Dan explained cheerfully. "And to tell you the truth, we're just about out of debt and that's all. Her father helped us out when we came up here."

"Mr. Varney owns that big corner lot, down here just as you

go into town," Mrs. Varney observed, with apparent irrelevance.

"You mean for a garage?"

"Well, I was just thinking . . ."

"Gosh, that'd be a wonderful site for it," Dan observed, after a silence during which he worked busily away at his disgraceful old car. "You'd get all the northbound traffic before it got into town."

"And southbound, too, if they move the highway."

"That's right, too!" said Dan, struck.

"I was just thinking about it," Dulce repeated vaguely.

"I wonder—" he began, after more thought—"I wonder what it would cost?"

"Five thousand, I suppose," said the Morado heiress carelessly.

"Oh, gosh," Dan commented simply.

"Well, you'd want it to be nice-looking, you know. Concrete, and a nice-looking filling station out in front, with a lawn and flowers."

"It'd pay for itself in two years," Dan said, out of a dream.

"I believe it would."

"I'm wondering," he confessed, with his awkward, ingenuous laugh, "where I could borrow five thousand dollars!"

"Oh, you wouldn't have to borrow it all. You'd only have to borrow one or two."

"Where'd the rest come from?"

"Well, investors—people who might go in with you."

"They'd get their money back!" Dan said again. And after a pause he added, with his wistful smile, "You're awfully nice to take such an interest."

"I really do take an interest in you and Cassy," Mrs. Varney admitted frankly.

"I'll be darned if I see why everyone is so nice to us!" Dan said simply.

"Don't ask *me* to answer that," Dulce said with quiet significance. A moment later she was walking slowly back across the road to her own house. Dan stood looking after her, puzzled.

A few days later brown, lean, joyous Cassy came home, with

Margaret Pringle Wallace on her arm. Dan told her, in one of their autumn drives, of Mrs. Varney's proposal, and Cassy was so enthusiastic that she fired his own rather dubious interest.

"If this garage plan goes through, Dan will have nobody to thank but you, Dulce," she said to her neighbor some weeks later. "And I'll probably have you to thank for keeping my husband!"

"Nobody ever said anything as mean as that to me before!" Dulce protested. They both laughed. "I have nothing to do, and it amuses me to try experiments," she said.

Cassy, jumping a small, squirming daughter out of her bath, rolling her in a bath towel, and beginning the leisurely business of pinning and powdering, felt a swift impulse of pity.

She herself was busy every instant of the time, but it was a happy and satisfying sort of occupation, and Cassy hadn't time, she told Dan, to be thankful enough, much less to find any fault with her lot!

In her mother's linen closet there were plentiful sheets and towels; downstairs, in the enormous dark closet off the dining room, there was enough china and glassware for two families. All the beds were wide and comfortable, and there were plenty of them; Tommy could be carried to a remote, silent room for his nap, Margaret could spend her first weeks safe on the big deep porch outside the kitchen.

This porch was screened, and Cassy loved to serve meals there. Sometimes she pressed one of the brown little Japanese women from the upper ranch into service, for special cleaning or changing, but for the most part old Granny was adequate, puttering away hour after hour with beds, dishes, and the inexorable washing.

With Margaret, who, unlike her brother, was an exemplary baby, asleep on the porch, and Tommy humming like a bee as he dug busily in the garden, Cassy could carry out a whole basket of wet undergarments and pin them on the long line in the sun, enjoying the once irksome duty as if it had been a recreation. The sun would shine down on her bared brown arms and bare dark head, the kitten walk cautiously over fallen willow whips, the

chickens peck about her feet. Her old wild joyous laugh broke out again; Dulce, walking in her own garden, would hear it from across the road.

At night there was always something exciting to tell Dan, either of the children, the garden, the animals. And when ground was broken for the new garage Dan had his own recounting to do.

"Bates, of the Cosmopolitan Garage, came out and made us an offer to quit, to-day."

"Not really! They're scared!" Dulce and Cassy and the old man would exult in chorus.

Below the gradual rise of the slope upon which the two farmhouses stood facing each other, a two-mile stretch of almost level highway led into the town. On either side the tall eucalyptus stood, with here and there a group of poplars or a few yellowed cottonwoods. Behind these were the meadows, dotted with mighty oaks and with scattered cattle, or the even checkerboards of vineyards, or the aisles of acres and acres of pruned fruit trees.

The farmhouses of the sunny valley might be plain, but there were cars in all the doorways, radio aërials on most of the roofs, and prosperous barns, stables, garages, and silos to bear testimony to the generosity of nature and the thrift of man. Big motor omnibuses rumbled to and fro, bearing sturdy little sunburned girls and boys to the new, spreading schools whose tiled roofs and adobe arches compared well with the handsomest of the old Missions.

Halfway between the house and the town the walls of the new garage began to rise against a background of oaks. It would stand on the main road, only a few hundred feet from where the new highway would presently intersect. In the December evenings, when Cassy was only too happy to creep wearily into bed and settle down to an hour's reading at half-past eight o'clock, Dan formed the habit of crossing the road to the Varney house to discuss plans with Dulce and her husband.

To both the Varneys the venture was like a new toy. Louis Varney, like many of the prosperous old farmers thereabouts,

was dying of a disorder commonly known as "Bright's" and knew it. Anything that amused his young wife and kept her happy was just so much sheer gain to him. He could walk the mile to the garage in the winter morning sunlight, and he liked to do it, with her braided golden head beside him, and to find young Wallace there, keen and optimistic and full of life and fun. The Wallaces were nice neighbors for Dulce.

"Ought to have a light there, Dan."

"Well, we're putting in a wall plug."

"Dan, do you see how pretty the road looks, and the rise down there, and the mountains, when you stop under the trees?"

"We've got to cut out the signs—it's too pretty to spoil with a lot of advertising!"

In February the Wallace and Varney Service Station opened its doors, but Dan's old partner was having one of his periodic sick times and could take no share in the excitement. He explained, from a luxurious bed, that he had been this way many times before—nothing for it but care and rest.

However, this attack differed from the others in that it was the last. Cassy, distracted by the claims of two babies with light cases of measles, and frantic to be free to give Dan all the encouragement he needed at this important moment, was sobered to hear more and more grave reports from the house across the road. Louis Varney was "very low" for a few cold spring days, and then suddenly it was "only a question of hours." He was comfortable under deepening stupor and pain-lulling poisons, and then there was a funeral, in a dreary, steady rain, with Dulce swathed in crape, Dan very sympathetic and helpful and distressed, and little Mrs. Wallace with a black veil over her dark hat and her brown face full of concern.

Then they were all going along comfortably again, and spring was upon the world, and incredible beauty flooded and deepened about them; beauty of high blue skies, beauty of green meadows and blooming orchards, beauty of wild bird songs and drifting seas of scent. The cherry trees hummed with bees all day long; down at the stream the willows were like fountains of green.

The opening roads brought hundreds and hundreds of twinkling motors up and down the highways, and Dan had three men working for him and had to build another big corrugated iron shed before the garage was six months old. Dulce walked down the road to see how things were going almost every day, or stopped her twinkling little car there, to say good-morning to her manager and co-partner.

She consulted Dan about all her business affairs: bonds, mortgages, property. There was another ranch, a smaller place, up by the Springs.

"Is she rich, Dan?" Cassy asked once, pouring his coffee.

"Well, yes. Her father left her something, and Place had something, and of course old Varney was well fixed."

"Is she going to travel? She said something about it, once, before he died."

"I don't know. She seems sort of indifferent about it now."

"She's probably all shaken up. Awful shock."

It was a summer morning on the side porch, and Cassy was coming and going between the table and the kitchen. Tommy, in the old high chair in which his mother had sat as a little girl, was bestowing portions of puffed rice and cream impartially upon his interior and his exterior. Heat was already simmering on the faraway mountain line, but grateful shadows still lay dewy in the dooryard, under the oaks and poplars and the big fig tree.

Dan regarded it all contentedly. His own peaches and apples were ripening on his own trees, and the cream from his own Jerseys was clotted in the pitcher. One of the Japanese came down from the upper farm with a basket of apricots, bronzed and cracked with ripeness; Granny returned from the barn with a bowl of eggs. It was all shabby, old-fashioned, satisfying.

"Well, she never was in love with him, you know," Dan said.

"Who? Dulce in love with old Varney? No, I don't suppose she was. Do you know anything about the first husband, Dan? She never says much about him."

"He was a rotter. He was a rich man's son, gambling, drink

—everything. She said once that they wouldn't have had a penny left if he hadn't died when he did."

"Tommy, put that down. Put it down. Put it down, darling."

"She says herself that she never was in love."

"I guess that's true, poor thing. Isn't it funny, a vital woman like that? She always seems just bursting with—well, the joy of living," Cassy said thoughtfully.

"She is. She's half Spanish, you know."

"That accounts for the eyes!"

And Cassy watched sympathetically her neighbor's struggles to fill her life. Dulce's house already seemed to her perfection, but the widow found much to do to it that summer and fall. The upstairs sitting room must be made into her bedroom, a new bathroom built, and lined with incredibly extravagant green tiles; a decorator came up from San Francisco to discuss greenish-lavender fittings and wall papers.

"I'm so sick of Colonial cream woodwork and chintzes!" Dulce said.

Cassy was amazed at the richness and variety of Dulce's possessions and of what Dulce told her about them. Sheraton chairs, Spode cups, and a portrait by Gilbert Stuart. Dulce had chests and chests of beautiful linens, Italian cut work, and Perugian runners.

It appeared that she had some of her schooling in New York State and had gone to Europe with her mother as quite a young girl. She knew something about letters and about art; she could talk brilliantly about plays and players. At Christmas time she read a paper at the local club, "Three Important Moderns: Millay, Masefield, Stern," and Cassy went with her and had a wonderful and inspiring afternoon, free of babies and dinner worries. But Dulce was unhappy even then.

They started French lessons, Cassy remembering the old detested verbs wistfully and eager to progress. Dulce worked too hard for three or four weeks and then threw the lessons over completely for bookbinding, going down to San Francisco once a

week to stay at a big hotel, go to the theater, and incidentally take a lesson.

"Why don't you go to New York, and perhaps on farther, for a real trip, Dulce?"

"Oh, what for? A woman drifting about alone, with a pocketbook wedged up under her arm, ordering meals!"

"You could get some clothes in Paris," Cassy suggested. For Dulce was more interested in clothes than in anything else, and was always exquisitely gowned.

"For whose benefit?" Dulce would ask bitterly. More than once she said, "I think I'll adopt a child."

"Adopt a husband, Dulce, and maybe you won't have to!"

"Cassy, if I could just find someone who worshiped me—idolized me, didn't want to see or speak or think of anyone else! My God, how I could love him!"

"There ain't no such animal," Cassy might offer amusedly, pouring milk carefully into Margaret's aligned clean waiting bottles.

"Oh, there must be! The great, devouring passion of life . . ." And Dulce would fall silent, brooding, with what Cassy used to call her "Spanish look" in her eyes.

"Cassy," Dulce asked suddenly one day, "were you and Dan madly in love when you ran away?"

"Well, I know I was. Nothing like Dan had ever come my way before," Cassy said honestly, remembering.

"How do you mean you were? Do you mean that Dan *wasn't?*"

"Oh, of course he was. But—you know Dan! He's just an adorable, affectionate infant," Cassy elucidated, smiling fondly at the thought of him. "He's—well, he's a loving nature. Dan loves everyone. I'm not. There have to be agonies when I care for a person."

"Me, too!" Dulce said swiftly, with a comprehending nod. Her dark eyes were fixed steadily on Cassy's, she was breathing deeply.

"It wouldn't be so much fun for you, Dulce, if you did fall madly in love."

"Maybe not."

"The Lord," Cassy said piously, "stand by the unfortunate man that you picked out!"

"The Lord help me," Dulce added.

"Because, you know," Cassy went on, putting cold food away neatly in the ice box, "sooner or later it all cools off into everyday commonplace living. You see your man with a toothache, and he sees you brushing your teeth, and money gives out——"

"Oh, don't!" Dulce entreated, covering her eyes with her hand.

"Well, isn't it true? In the first year of my marriage," Cassy confessed, now seated beside Tommy's high chair, introducing alternate spoonfuls of spinach and mashed potato into his ready little mouth, "in the first year of my marriage I was actively and unpleasantly sick in practically every public park or street car in San Francisco City. Not at all romantic for Dan——"

"Oh, stop!" Dulce protested again.

"Yes, sir, that was some of your doing!" Cassy assured Tommy

adoringly. "But Dan's sweetness is mighty nice to remember, just the same," she said.

"Wonderful," Dulce said, in a desolated tone.

She had got into the habit of trailing across the road to Cassy's house; she knew the whole routine now, when the children had their meals and what they ate, and what Cassy's daily duties were. She never helped much, but she never hindered either, and Cassy liked her company in the long, warm afternoons when Dan was away.

Dulce wore exquisite frail printed chiffons and transparent handkerchief linens; Cassy wore simple, tough, washable slip-on aprons from the general store. Dulce's hats were wide and shady, and she stepped in the most delicately strapped and heeled slippers; Cassy's footwear was the simplest and plainest of its kind. But the two women talked on equal terms; the younger was, after all, a Pringle. These were her ancestral acres, and she never forgot it. Cassy felt no inequality in their social position, and she felt an infinite superiority where happiness and usefulness and the exquisite sweetness of being loved and needed were concerned.

In August, when the figs were beginning to ripen, and the prunes lay fat and luscious under the drying trees, Mrs. Pringle came nervously, timidly up to Napa and spent there the happiest month of her whole starved, neglected life. What she felt for the glorious Tommy was the nearest thing to happy love she had ever known; from the fourth day of her four-weeks' stay Mrs. Pringle began to weep when anyone suggested her eventually, or ever, going home.

The weather was burning hot, but the disreputable stripped car had given place to a respectable machine now, and Cassy's genius for impromptu picnics was given full swing. Five nights a week she turned her baby over to old Granny Choate, put a basket, a grill, a frying pan and a coffee pot into the back of the car, and at sunset she and Tommy, Dan, Mrs. Pringle, and Dulce, were off for some spring, river, or even for the oceanside. They cruised as far as Bolinas, Point Reyes, Inverness, and came home late in the hot bright nights, satiated with happiness, and drowsy

with fresh air and gypsy suppers, pronouncing each picnic the best of them all.

They all liked Dulce. She was the soul of good-nature; it was impossible to exhaust her infinite adaptability. Any plan suited Dulce, or any change of plan. Any meal, eaten under any circumstances, was just what she liked. She was a most appreciative audience for the spirited Cassy, watching her with an admiring smile while she talked, and bursting into heartening laughter at the first opportunity.

Dulce loved to belittle herself, and they found her much finer than her own scornful self-portrait. She said frankly that she was a failure with children and didn't understand them, but Tommy liked her, and Cassy always laughed when she heard Dulce pathetically pleading with the infant Margaret exactly as if Margaret were her own age.

"Do you think you ought to eat that, Margaret? Will you please not suck my frill again?" Dulce would say appealingly.

She referred to her own bad upbringing as the source of her "devil" temper, and her selfishness, and her laziness, and her general lack of character.

"My father thought of nothing but horses, and my mother died when I was three. I bossed everybody on the place, and the naughtier I was the funnier they all thought it. I used to go into rages and bite and squeal like a filly, and my father would roar with joy!"

"Somehow I can't imagine you in a temper, Dulce."

"Oh, Cassy! But I'm on my good behavior now. I'm in terror that you and Dan won't like me. You just wait until something goes wrong!"

She did have lazy little selfish faults, Cassy knew. She loved to lie in bed in the morning, and was utterly inconsiderate of the servants or of any farmhand or overseer when her pleasure or comfort was jeopardized. The women of the town club rather disliked her; they smiled in a superior way when her name was mentioned, and indicated that she was not dependable, and that she was superficial and vain.

But she was generosity's self, and her charities knew no law. When Dulce's sympathies were once aroused she flung herself into the business of alleviating suffering or bettering conditions with enough ardor to inspire ten investigating committees and advisory boards. It was not enough for her to hear that a family down by the factory needed help and that the club thought of sending a visitor there; Dulce was that visitor, a self-appointed committee of one, and the suffering family was deluged by her gifts for such time as her interest in them lasted.

Also she was utterly unspoiled in heart. Her money, her beauty, and the position she had always occupied by natural right had bred in her none of those sterile, chilly attitudes that Cassy rather associated in her own mind with such advantages. Dulce was no snob, and she regarded her income as a pure accident. She never went anywhere, or did anything, for its social value or effect; dazzling invitations left Dulce indifferent, and her name in the social column of the local paper meant nothing to her at all.

Cassy was astonished to discover that the Pendletons, and consequently the Halloways and the Carters of San Mateo, were all related to Dulce.

"The Hugh Pendletons?"

"Oh, certainly! Mrs. Hugh Pendleton is my mother's sister. And my mother's brother was Harry Carter's father."

"But Dulce, you don't stay with them when you go down?"

"Oh, but they're all so horribly dull, my dear!"

The Pendletons, the Halloways, and the Carters—these were great folk. Cassy wrote this detail to Gertrude, just back from Europe, and Gertrude presently came up and visited at the ranch. Neither she nor Dulce showed to much advantage, Cassy thought; Dulce was cold and superior, and Gertrude very affected, talking about Debussy and D'Annunzio, and the new art. She wanted to be loyal to Gertrude, of course, but she could not but think that Dulce came best out of the encounter—pretty Dulce, whose burning cheeks and twisted braids looked so pretty in the lamplight, contrasted to Gertrude's cool contours and lifeless face.

It was a relief to have the two-days' strain over, Gertrude gone,

and Dulce her simple, amusing, affectionate self again. Cassy began, as the winter descended upon them, to be conscious of a genuine devotion to Dulce. They saw each other every day, and nothing happened in either family that was not fully discussed between them.

Dulce came loitering over to Cassy's kitchen at about noon, and while Cassy fed the babies and lured them off for naps, Dulce sat at the end of the table, sometimes peeling or shelling, more often idle.

They talked about the children, about the business, about Dan's miserable impacted tooth, about the ranches. They discussed all the affairs of the town, for Cassy was vitally interested in marriages, births, and deaths, and Dulce knew all the genealogies for generations back. Sometimes Dulce stayed for a scrambled one o'clock lunch; more often Cassy went back with her to share her own beautifully served meal.

Afterward they took the children for a drive, loitering along the lovely roads, up and down, between the orchards and vineyards, passing the peaceful farms, watching the winter sun setting in red and gold, until almost supper time. Dulce would be in the kitchen again, or in the big room off the kitchen that Cassy had converted into a nursery, when Dan came home.

The lights, the warmth, the women with their welcome and their chatter, the toddling babies in their woolly nightwear were pleasant things to find at the end of the day. Dan would take the kitchen rocker and begin to make love to his little girl; Dulce would stir, with apologies, fall into conversation, stir again, and again apologize for staying.

Three times a week, Dulce, explaining negligently that she was going to give Cassy time to tell him how cute the baby looked when she said, "Ga-ga," would precede them to her own house, and the Wallaces would follow an hour later, to dine with her. These were luxurious meals, for the Chinese servants enjoyed an opportunity to cook for a hungry man, and Dulce left nothing undone to make them right.

The little balls of Persian melon were crisp and icy, there were mysteriously delicious flavors in the steaming soup, there were broilers from the other ranch, and trout, and delicately browned rolls, and ices, and cheese over which Dulce worked busily for not less than five minutes, smashing it, seasoning it, sampling it critically before she would put it on crackers for Cassy and Dan.

Afterward they had the radio, or the big Brunswick, or cards, or idle talk, for an hour, and then the Wallaces went home, congratulating themselves on their neighbor. She was always so pretty, she was so friendly, she was so much more worth while than most of these other folk.

One drenching night, when Dulce had stayed with them for dinner, and when Cassy's cornbread and salad and omelette had been more than ordinarily successful—when, indeed, as Dulce said with a moan, they had all three "eaten themselves out of shape," Dan took the visitor home and returned wet and breathless a few minutes later to find Cassy placidly presiding at the scene that had been so happily familiar to them both for the past happy years.

She had on her gray wrapper, the loose soft coil of her curly dark hair lay on her neck. Tommy was asleep across the hall, but Margaret was wide awake, hopefully awaiting her ten o'clock bottle. Margaret looked out at him through her crib bars; there was a fire in the airtight stove, and the room was warm. The lamp threw a tempered glow in its own immediate vicinity; everywhere else were mellowed shadows, in and out of which Cassy came and went.

She moved armfuls of baby linen, set pins in readiness, folded blankets. She kept an eye on the little saucepan on the stove, where Margaret's meal was warming. She opened a window, picked up little garments, hung them on a chair. A tall, slender woman with a brown face and loving, merry eyes, she was busy with a dozen things at once.

"Dan, darling, are you drowned?"

"Pretty near it!"

"You must have run both ways."

"I did. It's simply streaming. Dulce didn't ask me to come in, she told me to get back and get dry, as fast as I could."

The wind made a violent onslaught upon the closed shutters; rain slashed against the old house in the dark.

"Wretched to think of her all alone over there in that big place, Dan!"

"Oh, I don't know. I don't think she minds it."

He was in his wrapper now, warm and dry. He looked over at his wife with his appealing smile, that smile that always had something plaintive, something wistful in it, and always would have, no matter how happy or how successful Dan might be.

And suddenly sheer love for him, for this squarely built man with the disordered fair hair and the appealing eyes, so wrung Cassy's heart that she felt almost faint.

"Can I give her her bottle?" he asked.

"Yes, but don't rouse her up, Dan. Let her go off if she will."

He took the baby and sat down in the rocker, and Cassy came across the room with the bottle in her hands. Suddenly she went down on her knees beside the two.

"Dan——"

He looked at her in surprise, even in faint alarm.

"Dan," she asked quickly and inconsequentially, "do you love me as much as you used to—in the old days, I mean—when we—when we had so much trouble—and no money—before the babies came?"

Half laughing, half crying, her brown face was close to his. He leaned across the baby and put a half kiss on the bridge of her nose.

"Why, you poor sap!" he said. He shifted the child on his arm. "What makes you think I don't?" he asked innocently.

"I don't think you don't!" she hastened to protest, shocked. "It's only that—in some way——"

"Well, shoot!" Dan said expectantly, as she paused.

"It's only that in some way we don't seem as close to each other as we used to be, Dan."

Dan looked puzzled for a moment. Then he said doubtfully:

"Isn't it just that we're both so busy, Cassy? You're tied up with the kids here, and I'm working like a horse at the shop."

"Yes, that's all it is!" she agreed, as he paused, as anxious to reassure him as herself. "Only, I sort of miss our old worries."

"We'll be sunk again!" he predicted cheerfully.

"'Member the time I sold your old chauffeur's uniforms, Dan?"

"My old——? That's right, so you did. Gee!"

"And the Cannon house, Dan, on a hot summer afternoon?"

His pleasant face clouded.

"I hate to think of that dump!"

"Oh, I love to think of it, Dan."

"You're going to be fixed pretty soon so that you won't have to remember all that."

"I'm not sure," she said, her head against his arm as she half sat, half knelt on the floor beside him, "I'm not sure that I ever want to be fixed that way!"

"Bottley-boken, bottley-boken?" Margaret contributed conversationally.

"Did you break another bottle, you bad girl?"

"No, that's that same old bottle. She loves to talk about it."

"Isn't she pretty, with the light in her eyes?"

"Dan, I think she understands every word we say." Cassy got stiffly to her feet, stooped to take the child from his arms. "Still love your old wife?" she asked lightly. But the word still meant magic to her, and tears came into her smiling eyes as she spoke.

"Well, what do you think?" Dan questioned in turn. The words came out with a roar, he dropped his weary head on his arms. While she was settling the baby for the night, Cassy saw him stagger like a drunken man toward his bed. "Call me at six, Cass," he muttered from the pillow.

A little later Cassy went to kneel beside him. He was sleeping like a baby, his handsome head flung back, his face youthful and innocent in the tempered light. She knelt there a long time, staring, hardly thinking, and saw her own tears shining on his

hand before she raised herself, weary and chilly and stiff, to go cautiously about the big walnut bed and creep quietly in beside him.

In the spring, for the first time, the Wallaces went up to spend the day at the Morada stock ranch, ten miles back in the hills. This was where Dulce had spent most of that spoiled and willful childhood of hers; Cassy and Dan had heard repeated allusions to it but had not seen it before.

They took Tommy, boldly exploratory in his brown laced shoes and striped blue romper, and toddling Margaret, particularly alluring in blue gingham. The children's delight in the place was equaled by Cassy's; she loved their screams over peacocks and baby goats, and shouted and laughed almost as gayly as they did.

Dulce, who looked her handsomest in white, assumed an indifferent, matter-of-course air for the occasion, but the others knew that she was deeply pleased by their enthusiasm.

"But, Dulce, I had no *idea* it was so beautiful, so finished—why, it's like a farm out of a picture book!"

"It *is* a pretty old place."

"It's so perfect—it's so clean!"

"Ah, well, you know, you have to keep horses as clean as babies, sometimes cleaner," Dulce reminded them.

"That's for you, Margaret, you dirty girl!"

They walked about on fresh emerald grass, between the paddocks that were trimly fenced with white pickets and outlined with tall poplars just breaking into leaf. The low lines of the stable roofs were red and their walls white; there was not a fallen twig on the raked yards outside the long line of box-stall doorways. The day was still, blue, and hot.

Horses were looking in mild interest out of some of the doorways, tree branches blotting their glossy sides, and the white-washed walls, and the warm red roofs, with mellow shadows. In the fields mares stood ruminating, deep in clover; a dozen young horses raced about a level field, their wild hoofs flinging clods of soft turf into the sunshiny air.

"That's La Lomita Ladysmaid," Dulce said, at one fence. "She's from Kentucky—her father was Ladysman, and her mother was Maidenhair. She's supposed to be one of the finest mares in America. Sidecar, who ran at Epsom this year, is her half brother."

"Where do you sell these beautiful horses, Dulce?"

"Oh, everywhere. We're sending some to Illinois next month."

"And these are the——"

"La Lomita Stables."

"*Gee,*" Dan exclaimed forcefully, "I think this is fascinating!"

"My father," Dulce explained, as they walked about, "was mad about this place. He wanted to make it the finest stock farm in the country. We used to have pheasants, and sheep, and polled Herefords—we still have a few of those. My father brought the white peacocks West with him, himself. I've kept those, but we don't keep up the other lines. And we don't show the cattle; we just keep it for home use."

The very language enchanted Dan. He kept saying dazedly that it was the darnedest place he'd ever seen, and every time he said it the women laughed.

"But, Dulce, why don't you live here? It's ever so much prettier than the other place."

"Well, Lou didn't like it, for one thing. He used to imagine the altitude gave him asthma. It's ten miles out of town, too. And then I married my first husband here," Dulce explained, pressing her white palm upward against a filly's soft nuzzling mouth. "He was an Eastern boy, a sort of ne'er-do-well, really, whose family thought he might settle down here. But he never did. He broke my father's heart, and he would have mine, if he hadn't been thrown one morning, riding a horse that every man we had on the place said——"

They were walking back toward the house now. Dulce paused, her face quite flushed with an annoyed explanation.

"Every man on the place *said* that he was a bad horse," she repeated. "But, no, Frank would mount him. I walked into the house, I simply couldn't watch it. But before I got there I heard

them all shouting, and the stallion went by me, lickety-split across the flower beds, dragging Frank like a sack!"

"Horror!" Cassy whispered.

Dan was hardly listening.

"What a life!" he said. "Up here in the hills, with all the fruit and flowers and poultry you want, and these things to watch!"

"Why, Danny, I never knew you were so fond of horses!"

"Gosh, yes, I've always been crazy about them!"

"Dan, I'll have to put you in here as foreman."

The house was old-fashioned, but Cassy thought its fresh Colonial white and green much more attractive than Dulce's other, more luxurious place, down in the valley. There was a wide porch all about the lower floor at La Lomita, and the shade from an old-fashioned garden fell soft and green on the wide wooden steps above the drive.

Below was a lawn, and roses just beginning to bloom, and masses of garden flowers all ready for spring. After their walk in the warm sunshine, they were all glad to sit still in the shade for awhile, awaiting the call for luncheon. Even the birds and bees had left the garden, in the noon stillness, but Cassy heard a cock crow, off in the direction of the farm, and liked the gallant little sound in the summer day.

One of the trainers came around the corner of the house, and Dulce and he conversed in easy Spanish undertones. Afterward they went in to luncheon, served in the shaded dining room—a perfect meal, in cooking and serving and appointments, as were all Dulce's meals.

Cassy had an odd moment, at the luncheon. For just a few seconds she experienced a curious feeling that the scales had moved and that Dulce's side had gone up. She was jealous—just a deep, faint prick—of Dulce.

She laughed it down; it was too ridiculous. But the beauty and the charm of the place overwhelmed her good common sense in spite of herself; more than once during the meal the miserable little emotion tried to return and had to be fought down.

When she went upstairs with the babies for their naps, the

same order and beauty there brought back the same little maddening prick. Such white beds, such speckless flowery wall papers and Colonial paneling. Shades drawn so primly at the windows, towels ranged so neatly on glass bars. Cassy sat in Margaret's room, dreaming, until Margaret went to sleep, the color, sweetness, warmth, loveliness of La Lomita wrapping her in a sort of stupor.

It would be impossible, she mused, to bring their own shabby ranch house to this pitch of perfection. It was a stupidly built place, to begin with, its rooms high and boxlike, its whole situation stark and ugly. The floors were dark and splintery, and the curtains that dangled at the tall windows had not been changed since Cassy's childhood.

"Well, anyway, Dulce has no Tommy and she has no Margaret!" Cassy found herself arguing ridiculously, as, with her head against Margaret's pillow, she too fell into a doze.

Meantime Dulce had asked Dan if he would walk with her up to the stables; she had to talk to Pedro.

"Do you ride, Dan?"

"Never been on a horse in my life that I remember."

"I was only seventeen when Frank Place came up here to live," Dulce confided suddenly. "He was handsome and something of a rake, and of course I thought he was marvelous. My father loathed him from the start, and that attracted me to him, too.

"We used to keep twenty men in those days, raising fancy stock, and go all over everywhere, to horse shows, taking blue ribbons. I'll show you my ribbon room. But afterward, of course, Frank was no good. . . ."

They walked along, and the beauty of the glowing airless spring afternoon deepened like a spell about them. The world was rich with flower scents and the smell of turned earth and new grass.

"But, then, how'd you happen to marry Mr. Varney, Dulce?"

"Lou? Well, he was the trustee, you know. My father had

always loved him, and so had I, for that matter. And I was so bitterly *lonely,* Dan."

Her voice shook, and glancing at her he saw that her beautiful dark eyes were filled with tears.

Going back, she said she would take him through a lane that was a short cut. It was a part of the farmyard; chickens were fluffing in last year's fallen leaves as they walked through. The sun, descending in the west, smote through the young leaves of a long line of feathery pepper trees in a blaze of glory.

Suddenly Dulce stopped her companion, wheeling about in front of him, laying a hand on his shoulder. Her face, under the beautiful white hat, was a little pale; rings of her fair hair clung to her temples with heat.

"Dan, there's something I want to say to you."

"Shoot!" he encouraged her sympathetically, looking down at her with his smile that was partly the smile of a faun and partly the wistful look of a puzzled little boy.

"If I do," Dulce said, her eyes raised to his, her face deadly serious, "I'm going to regret it all my life!"

The color crept up to his cheek bones; his own face became tense, quite unsmiling.

"Go ahead," he said.

"Dan," she whispered, beginning to tremble, "can't you see how it is with me?"

Dan continued to regard her in silence; the red deepening in his cheeks.

"You've changed my whole life for me," Dulce said. "I'm mad about you! I'm *mad* about you, Dan. I never dreamed it—I didn't want it—I've been fighting it, God knows!

"But I have it the way they have it in books, Dan. I want your arms about me—once," she whispered, throwing her head back, shutting her eyes. "I want you to kiss me!"

"Dulce——" Dan said, putting his arms about her, holding her close to him, his face against hers as he kissed her.

Chapter XII

THE smothered flame burned all through the hot summer and into the fall. Dan was a man possessed, he moved blindly through the days and nights, consumed only by one need: the need to see Dulce, to hear her voice, to hold her, protestant and resisting, against him, and kiss her beautiful, passionate mouth.

For the rest, he was in a dream. There was a flourishing modern garage in the dream, toward which two long lines of twinkling cars were always converging, and there were business talks, business decisions, trips here and there on business.

And there was a bare ranch house in the dream, with willows and peppers and chickens indiscriminately mixed in its back yard, and a baby girl often asleep on the side porch, in a shabby perambulator that had once cost nine dollars, second hand. There was a sturdy little boy shouting, "Daddy," and routing the flying hens. There were other figures: a Japanese woman helping to put up tomatoes, and an old, old woman tottering about the big, shabby kitchen, and there was, of course, Cassy.

Cassy, brown skinned and lean and active and full of plans; a sweet woman, chattering of her club, her babies, and her kitchen. Dan, in a dreamlike sort of way, liked her very much. He did not hear one third of what she said or feel particularly interested in the third he did hear, but just the same he felt that she was a pleasing, amusing, and lovable person. Sometimes he kissed her and drove her and the babies somewhere in the car; she would ask him what on earth he was thinking about, to go right by the post office, and he imagined that he answered her apologetically and affectionately enough. Anyway, she found no fault with him.

He was only awake when he was with Dulce. Dulce beat in his heart and ran in his veins; his senses were dead until she appeared.

Often she drove down to the garage in the morning and would jump out of her car, trim and fresh and beautifully gowned, to chat with him. Dan might be talking carburetors or valves with some passing motorist when she arrived, but he always knew it,

and the palms of his hands would grow wet and his speech thick.

When he was free he would walk over to her. There was never anything that the men could see.

"Hello——" and a "darling" added under his breath, without any change in his expression.

"Dan——" But the way she said it said many other things beside.

They would stand smiling at each other, too happy to speak.

"Cassy asked me to tell you something, but I'll be darned if I can remember what it is."

"I just stopped there."

"Everything O.K.?"

"Oh, absolutely." It had been Dulce who had decided that as their feeling for each other was not in itself wrong, and as the knowledge of it would only make Cassy unhappy, it would be far wiser to keep it strictly a secret.

Their moments together were brief and stolen, and all the sweeter for that. Once they went up to La Lomita together and walked about among the clean, tree-shaded paddocks for an hour, and that was an afternoon for Dan to mark with a white stone. Often they would not see each other alone for days, except for these casual, conspicuous minutes at the service station.

But from the informal meals on the side porch and from the picnics he always took her home and followed her into her own house for a few wonderful minutes. The rooms at Dulce's were sweet with flowers and perfumes, the lights shone soft on rich rugs and handsome old bits of walnut and mahogany. To Dan this came to be enchanted ground.

He never stayed very long. He always went back dutifully to Cassy and usually found her flitting about the old house opposite in the summer dusk, carrying Margaret from her perambulator to her porch bed, straightening the sheet under Tommy, running a motherly exploring hand into the collar of his thin little old faded pajamas.

Everything here was shabby and worn. Cassy's thin summer wrapper, her pajamas, the children's clothes for day and night,

the chairs and tables, the walls, the cooking pans and plates and table napkins—all cheap and worn. Mrs. Pringle had never sent any of her best things to the Napa ranch, and after three hard years with the Wallaces they were not any better in appearance.

"Dan, you know what I'd like to do as soon as we can afford it? Open a door from this room to the roof and have it all canvased, you know, and have this room papered in some gay paper."

"Why bother? All this place needs is to be torn down!"

"Oh, *Dan!*" And she would widen reproachful, disappointed blue eyes at him. "Are you feeling tired to-night, darling? Has anything gone wrong at the garage?"

He made himself answer her civilly, patiently. But it demanded all the self-control he possessed. It was not that he was angry with Cassy or cross with her. Simply, she disturbed him. Her voice interrupted the flow of his exquisite thoughts of Dulce.

For many days it was heaven enough for them both to have discovered each other; they asked nothing more. Life ran like a river of gold, and under its apparently everyday current they were both conscious of the glory, the enchantment of love. Their eyes shone with the secret; they would look at each other quietly, without so much as a smile, yet with faces that brimmed with joy.

"Dan, are you sorry?"

"Sorry!" And he would smile down at her, for she was not tall, her fair head coming only to his shoulder. "Yes, I'm sorry that I ever met you!"

"Oh, I *won't* believe that!"

"It's true. It would have been easier all round."

"It would have been—more peaceful," she once conceded with a sigh. "But it wouldn't—" she argued pleadingly—"it wouldn't have been any happier for you, Dan, never to have had that marvelous first afternoon at La Lomita, never to have known?"

"I don't know, honey. Lots of men plug along all their lives, not exactly happy, not exactly unhappy—just plugging."

"But what a waste!" Dulce whispered.

"I know."

"Cassy has a full life, with the children, her mother, her clubs, and everything," she said one day wistfully, "without you!"

"Yes," he reminded her bitterly, "but that's marriage."

"I'll have to go away, Dan. You must stay here. We can't stand this."

He turned and walked away from her; they were standing in the autumn sunshine at the service station, the trim strip of lawn at their feet was littered with crisp little curled oak leaves.

"You can't go," he said stubbornly.

Dulce broke into forlorn laughter.

"This is terrible!" she said desperately.

"I couldn't get along without you," Dan muttered.

Cassy was but a brown, thin shadow in the background of his life, now, a dim impression of nervousness, overwork, fatigue, utter unromantic practicability. Dulce, fragrant, silk clad, crowned with her tightly wound golden braids, was the reality. When he was not with Dulce he was thrilling with memories of her, thrilling with anticipation of their next meeting.

Her telephone number was enough to make his heart begin a thick, slow, ecstatic beating. "Nine-nine-eight-eight," he would say, shutting himself into the little soundproof telephone closet at the garage, looking confusedly about the four narrow walls of the booth that were lined with bright visions of her, waiting for the delicious voice.

"Oh, hello, Dan."

"Hello, dear."

"Where are you?"

"At the garage."

"I'm coming down about eleven, Dan."

"In the white coat?"

"Oh, you idiot—yes, if you like!"

"But it's only nine, now, Dulce."

"Don't I know it? Wasn't I sound asleep when you called?"

"You lazy little thing."

"Aren't I? But Danny——"

"Listening."

"Call me again in about an hour?"

"Right!"

"Because eleven o'clock is two hours off, after all, and there'll be people round there."

And the conversation would end on a laugh.

Dulce, like every other woman radiantly and completely in love, liked intrigue. She sometimes came to the farmhouse, in these days of dreams and thrills, and was her most exquisite, amusing self with Cassy and the babies. Dan would find her there when he came in at night.

"What do you think you're doing with that poor bewildered infant?"

"I'm feeding her her soup.—Take it, Margaret!"

Dulce would look up at him, the kitchen's red lights shining in her brilliant eyes, pearls at her ears, under the crown of gold, a great green ring flashing on her white hand.

Their eyes would meet, unsmilingly, significantly.

"Oh, botheration!" Cassy would exclaim from the sink. "Dan, roll up that sleeve for me. I meant to get into a fresh apron, but I haven't had a chance. Poor Kito left the sink faucet running, and we had a flood here about an hour ago. Don't eat that, Tommy, and go shut the door, darling. Tommy, did you hear me? Put it down and go shut the hall door—no, the other door."

Thin, brown, disheveled, she would smile at Dan and Dulce —pretty Dulce, so neat, fresh, and fragrant, anxious to be helpful, but not quite knowing how.

"Cassy has to do everything her own way," she once said to Dan.

"She hasn't much system," Dan observed.

"Danny, is that quite loyal?"

"Well, she's the first to admit it," he would say, surprised.

In the dark yard, outside the kitchen, he would escort Dulce to her car, and they would kiss each other deeply, passionately.

"You lovely thing!" Dan would whisper.

"I love you!" she would say simply, in return. The words seemed new when Dulce said them.

Nowadays, when he telephoned her, to discover that the line was busy, or that Mrs. Varney was out, he suffered an amazing cruel moment of blankness, for a little while he could hardly collect his senses and return his attention to the practical affairs of business. Dulce went to a women's luncheon and bridge party one day, and Dan, discovering this from the maid, was waiting, inconspicuously parked, in a lane by the house when all the chattering and laughing women filed out at six o'clock.

He saw Dulce walking toward her car and honked his horn, and she glanced quickly about and, changing her course, came slowly toward him. And these few minutes of laughing, ecstatic confidence in a dark bare winter lane became one of their happiest memories.

"If it could only go on like this!" she grieved, on an evening when Cassy believed him to be delayed at the garage, and when he was really at La Lomita, dining luxuriously in all the warmth and order and sweetness of Dulce's home, afterward taking his accustomed place on a low hassock at her silken knee in the firelight.

"Can't it?" he asked.

"Oh, dearest boy, no. People will begin to notice, to talk. We can't have that. No," Dulce pursued it thoughtfully, "I'll have to go away for awhile, and after awhile it'll all cool down—it'll be better——

"Oh, what a little liar I am!" she interrupted herself with a helpless laugh. And she leaned forward and rested her fragrant laughing face against his. Dan turned, rose to his knees, and took her loveliness and sweetness strongly into his arms.

"I love you so!"

"Yes, and I love you, too, Dan!"

"You can't go 'way from me, honey."

"I've got to, Dan. We've got to play square!"

"Even if it makes all three of us unhappy, eh? That's the way women look at it."

"But Cassy and I," she explained with an innocent uplifting of eyebrows, "are women, after all!

"If we could only be just friends, you and I," she presently said regretfully. "If she would let me have you like this, just for dinner, and home at nine o'clock, once a week. We don't want anything more except to realize how we love each other and be friends."

"Dulce, you know I want more than that!"

His face was close to hers; she looked up into burning eyes.

"Yes, I know," she whispered, her face drooping against his again.

"I want you to belong to me," he said.

"And how I want to, Dan!"

With him still kneeling beside her, their hands locked, she looked about the comfortable, homelike room, with its fire and its lamps, its subdued colors and big chairs.

"Wouldn't it be heaven, Dan, you and I alone up here—evenings like this?"

"You're so beautiful, Dulce!" he told her humbly, his hungry eyes devouring the fine smooth satin of her skin, the dark, black-lashed eyes that were faintly dewy now, the rich braids, golden in firelight and lamplight, and the supple, full body, stretched at length in her chair, with rounded knees exposed in transparent silk stockings, and the lacy folds of her informal house attire falling beside her, and trailing on the dark rug. Her beautiful white hands were jeweled; Lou Varney had given his young wife many jewels, and she loved them, loved the flash of big stones on her fingers and the soft shimmer of pearls against her throat. She was wearing pearls to-night, and the pinkish-creamy globes threw faint umber shadows and little sparks of fire on her skin. Utterly desirable and lovable and unattainable, her hands gripped Dan's big hands, and her beauty rested against his shoulder.

On that particular night, when he went home, Mrs. Pringle, who had been paying them a long visit, had a bad toothache. Cassy was at the telephone in the lower hall, when Dan came in at ten o clock; her anxious eyes wandered to him as she talked to a dentist. She wore faded pajamas which a wilted cotton kimono partly concealed, her dark hair was strained off her face, and

pinned in strange lumps. Her skin was devoid of powder or lip red; after Dulce's opulence she looked almost scrawny.

"It seems to be very sensitive, Doctor, and at times it jumps . . ."

For the following hour, while Dan tried to read in bed, Cassy and her mother roamed the hallways like distracted ghosts; Dan could smell essence of cloves, and at about midnight Cassy came prowling into his room for aspirin.

Later, reporting her mother mercifully asleep, she returned and sat at the foot of his bed, rubbing cold cream into her face.

"What on earth have you done to your hair?"

"Oh, I washed it to-day, and rubbed tonic into it, and pinned it up tight, to give it some shape." She wiped her face with a soft old towel and extended it toward him, smiling wearily. "I ask you to *look* at that dirt!" she said. "It's wood ashes, of course. They fly all over the kitchen. Margaret's little nose was like a coal mine to-night. Where'd you have to go, Dan? Woodland, was it?"

He had forgotten the fiction that had bought his wonderful hours at La Lomita.

"Just up the road a way."

"Horrible night." She was vaguely sympathetic. "I can't kiss you, I'm all grease," she presently said, going away.

Then he was free to invite the dream of Dulce to return.

Chapter XIII

A FEW days later, when Cassy's mother had returned to town, and when a soft early winter rain was falling on the Napa valley, the news came that Leroy Pringle had had a stroke, in his office, and that his hours were numbered. Gertrude, on the telephone, had already assumed the decent, resigned tone that marks, in the fortunate survivors, the presence of death.

On Cassy's kitchen table there lay the great Thanksgiving turkey which this same father had only yesterday been designed to share; a family Thanksgiving had been planned, the Pringles were to have come up early in the morning of the holiday.

Cassy took her buttery, onion-scented hands from a great bowl of dry crumbs and summoned the kitchen forces. Outside, in the yard, rain fell in gentle straight lines; the kitchen was warm and comfortable, but whenever the outer door was opened cool damp airs came in. The clock's hands stood at three.

"I'll have to drive down, Kito; I'll have to make that four o'clock from Vallejo. You'd better wake Tommy, Granny . . ."

She felt sobered, impressed, not exactly sad. The dry little shell that had held Leroy Pringle had never been a very living thing. Hurriedly, one eye on the clock, she packed a bag and got Tommy and herself ready for the trip, leaving little Margaret in the care of old Granny and of the little Japanese woman who was Cassy's regular helper in the kitchen now. She interrupted her preparations to telephone the news to Dulce's maid, who said Dulce was up at La Lomita, and to call the service station.

"Joe, is Dan there, or has he gone?"

"He left about an hour ago, Mrs. Wallace."

"Oh, dear! We could have gone down with him."

For this was Dan's regular day for going down to the city. Nothing left to do now but take the trolley and change to the boat at Vallejo. Cassy made the trip dreamily, wondering how her father's death would affect her mother, would affect her own fortunes.

The familiar Pringle limousine, that Dan himself had been

driving a few years ago, met her at the ferry. Mr. Pringle, said the present driver seriously, was very low. Cassy got into the car wearily, thankfully; her heavy suitcase and the care of the active child had tired her somewhat already. But where Tommy was concerned it was a happy sort of tiredness; she thought he was stunning in his new blue coat; he was engagingly excited over the trip.

They were about to wheel, at the ferry parking space, for the run out to the old house in the Mission when Cassy chanced to glance at the parked cars that were awaiting their time to go on the boat. She saw Dulce's car, and standing beside it, talking to Dulce, who was at the wheel, was Dan.

And instantly, with a shock that seemed to make the whole world reel and that filled her mouth with salt water and moistened her palms with cold perspiration, Cassy understood.

She understood her own blindness, and Dan's absentmindedness, and his critical fretfulness. And she knew why Dulce had been so troubled lately, showing puzzled moods, apologetic moods, silent moods, fitfully and unreasonably, from time to time.

She felt a little dazed, as if her head had had a blow.

Tommy, off the seat, with his small body pressed against her knee, asked her a question, and Cassy looked out at the cold winter streets and the blowing wind of late afternoon and answered him somehow.

"That's it," she kept saying in her mind. "That's it. That's been the trouble."

The sense of physical shock continued. The picture of the bright, luxurious little car, with a pretty furred woman at the wheel, and a squarely built, bareheaded man in a big coat talking to her, was painted before Cassy's eyes; she could not shake it off.

No mistaking the situation. Dulce had been quietly crying; Dan's face agitated and concerned.

"Oh, my God. Oh, Dan. Danny! Oh, my God."

Cassy swallowed with a dry throat.

"Now what?" she asked herself in a whisper. "Now what? What are we all going to do?"

The old friends of the Pringle family, coming and going through these solemn days, said that Cassy was a much developed person, after almost five years of marriage, and that Mr. Wallace was a nice fellow, so thoughtful and considerate of everyone. As for the noisy, curly-headed, shouting little boy, well, he was poor Mrs. Pringle's one great consolation.

Dan had come down to the city the day after Cassy's coming, explaining that he had got back to Napa before receiving her message.

"I got word to Dulce, and she said to tell you that she felt terribly sorry and that she'd see Margaret every day."

"Got word to her?"

"Yes. She's up at La Lomita, you know. She's been there all week."

"Of course."

She was broken, apathetic, quiet. Even Gertrude was bearing the blow of her father's death more courageously than Cassy. Grief did not rob Gertrude of her faculties as it seemed to have robbed poor little Cassy. Gertrude was still capable of thought

"Cassy, now this is the hat I like, and it's the only one that looks decent on me. And I feel that poor Papa always liked me in a small hat, and that—even now, it's a sort of pleasure—a sad pleasure but a pleasure, to do what he would like. But it's the duplicate of the one you chose, and it seems to me, in church tomorrow, that it would look ridiculous for us both to be wearing the identical . . ."

Thus Gertrude, with much more of the same sort. Cassy let them have their will with her and drew a long breath of relief when the funeral was over, and the drive with Dan back to Napa had restored her to the familiar shabby kitchen, and to loving little mother-hungry Margaret.

A sense of being bruised and shocked bewildered her. She kept trying to break through the veil that enveloped her, somehow to "come alive." She even tried to convince herself that that little scene down at the ferry slip had no significance, that Dan's untruth about Dulce's whereabouts had no significance, nor the thou-

sand other memories that flocked to her mind to confirm them both.

While Dan slept that night, in their big, shabby bedroom, Cassy lay awake beside him, thinking, thinking, thinking. And the next morning she had to tell him that she knew.

They were at the breakfast table in the kitchen. Winter sunshine was streaming gayly in; Cassy had Margaret in her lap, and was feeding her tastes of boiled egg; Granny had taken Tommy out into the yard to help feed the chickens.

Cassy's dark hair was brushed with unusual neatness, and she had on a fresh stiff pink apron. Dan, finishing his second cup, enjoying the warmth of the kitchen, after the vaultlike cold of the bathroom and halls upstairs, had been discussing the affairs of Cassy's mother, Gertrude's desire to spend most of her time in Europe, and the widow's probable coming to Napa for a long visit, in the spring.

"You ought to telephone Dulce to-day, Cass."

A sudden wave of anger and pain engulfed her; she said quickly, but in a tone that quivered and broke on the last words:

"Dan—I know about you and Dulce."

The words echoed blankly on the warmed air that was scented with coffee and toast and bacon. Dan put down his newspaper and looked at her steadily with a little quickening of breath.

"Know what?" he asked, with a little edge to his tone.

"I saw you—down at the ferry, the day Papa died."

"Hah!" Dan said gruffly, in another silence.

With a cold sweet blast of outer air Tommy and Granny came in with the eggs. Tommy, whose cheeks were scarlet with frost, came to his mother to have his sweater unbuttoned and his cap pulled off.

"Can I cook Mar'get the li'l' banty's egg, Mummy, in my own frying pan?"

"But don't forget your butter this time, sweetheart."

"Zis nice room in house—yes!" the Japanese woman said, in a high, laughing key, arriving and unwrapping herself.

Margaret, released, toddled madly about after Tommy. The busy day in Cassy's kitchen had begun.

"I feel rotten about this," Dan muttered thickly, following her into the big pantry, that still smelled, and always would smell, of decaying wood, mice, and apples. Cassy blindly began to straighten spice boxes; she would remember all her life the allspice and cinnamon tins that had spilled fragrant little squares of spice about their bases. Whole nutmegs—a heavy half citron rolled in a crumpled bag . . .

"Who told you?"

"I saw you down at the Monticello Ferry last week."

"Come now," Dan said, "you've got something more to go on than that!"

"Don't talk to me that way, Dan!" she said, her tone shaking.

"Well, what was the harm of my stopping for a minute to talk to anyone I know as well as Dulce?"

The clumsy effort at pretence hurt her almost as much as the fact. A pang of pity for his awkwardness, his little-boy bravado, stirred within her.

"There was harm in it after you had lied to me about her being at La Lomita!"

"It wasn't a lie if I *thought* she was at La Lomita."

They were quarreling horribly, commonly, Cassy thought affrightedly. This was the way married persons quarreled.

"But you know very well that you knew she wasn't at La Lomita!"

She was saying just the things she didn't want to say and taking just the tone she didn't want to take. She began to tremble.

"I like Dulce," Dan offered sulkily.

Cassy, pushing a can of tomatoes into line, made no answer. She stood, tall and lean and furious, working, with her back half turned to Dan, in the odorous gloom of the pantry.

"Why shouldn't I?" Dan demanded.

"Oh, no reason at all!" she answered, frantic.

"It doesn't—*mean*—anything," Dan said.

"Oh, no!"

Tears shook her voice, and she took refuge in anger.

"You don't think for one instant that I'm *jealous?*" she asked, in a low, scornful tone. "Ha!" Cassy went on, with a little mirthless laugh, "if it was only that! You don't think I mind your running up to La Lomita, and flattering Dulce Varney, and spending all your spare time there, do you? No. It's not jealousy, it's just the utter ridiculousness of the whole thing! You, a husband and father, with all the problems we have to solve—about money, and the children, and the ranch—and you run after a pretty widow, eight years older than you are, who has money, and who's *had* two husbands——"

She stopped, ashamed of her tone and her words, taken unaware with a passion of resentment.

"I haven't *done* anything!" Dan protested awkwardly.

"Oh, I know you haven't *done* anything, she's much too cautious for *that,*" Cassy, to her own surprise and discomfiture, heard herself saying furiously. Dan was silent.

He stood behind her, and she straightened tins and cans with nervous fingers. She found a box partially filled with crackers, gathered them carefully, and placed them in another box. The sound of angry words died away, and there was a pause.

"I'm awfully sorry——" Dan then offered, slowly. "I—I like Dulce, and she—well, she's lonely. But—you don't have to worry about it. It doesn't—*mean*—anything."

His distress, his gentleness, smote her with a sudden sense of helplessness and misery, and her eyes filled.

"I mean—gosh, it's just—well, it's *over,*" Dan went on, painfully explanatory. "I didn't know how you'd feel."

"It spoils everything!" Cassy muttered thickly, in the pause

"It doesn't have to."

She was stubbornly, unhappily silent again. Then she said:

"It puts me in a horrible position!"

Dan did not speak.

"You don't suppose I'll ever want to see her again?" Cassy demanded bitterly, after another silence. "You don't suppose I'm going to make a *joke* of it?"

"Say, listen," he protested, suddenly roused, "how far do you think it's gone?"

"Oh, I don't suppose it's gone far at all; that isn't what worries me," Cassy answered impatiently, feeling herself thin, disheveled, shabby, and half sick with a cold, tired and unpopular and supremely at a disadvantage. She groped for a handkerchief, found none, and went on resentfully, "But this sort of thing makes me sick! Married people with 'cases,' writing notes and making appointments——"

She stopped, and after a silence Dan submitted doubtfully:

"Would you like me—not to see her any more?"

It was Cassy's turn to be silent; she did not look at him.

"Would you?" Dan persisted.

Cassy shuddered, turned to pass him on her way back to the kitchen.

"It's so cold in here!" she complained thickly. "I'm so tired of the *cold* in this house!"

Dan put his hand on her shoulder, and the touch weakened her through all her being with sheer love of him, big, stupid, blundering boy that he was, and she longed to put her arms tight about his neck and cry out all her loneliness and pain on his big cigarette-scented tweed coat. But she held her head stiffly erect.

"Listen, will you let me talk?" he said, touched himself by her pallor and her manner.

"Please—Danny—I can't talk about it," she stammered. Her brown face was wet with tears. Dan looked frightened.

"Will you come upstairs, Cassy?"

"I can't, now. Some other time—please, Dan."

He went away. They heard the engine of his car chugging in the frosty dooryard, where the sunshine was striking now in bold lances. Then, with a trail of smoke the car went down the road between the tall bare trees.

Chapter XIV

It was like a nightmare; she and Dan talking to each other like this. The whole morning was like a nightmare.

When Margaret and Tommy, bundled like Eskimos, were running and shouting in the yard, Cassy went into the sitting room, determined to get it into livable use for the winter. The stove in there had smoked last Easter, and the whole dismal apartment had been closed all summer long.

She opened the shutters and looked out into dank shrubbery. All that must come out. The sunshine would be here from noon on, even in winter. But in this morning light, filtered through heavy leafage, it was like a vault.

Her heart was bleeding, she could feel it. Cassy pressed her hand over it; she made herself think of what she was doing.

The fire in the airtight stove smoked bitterly, banners of acrid gray air poured into the room. The windows were opened, and desolating coldness and smokiness fought for mastery. Cassy's eyes watered and her throat thickened with the smoke.

The chairs were comfortable enough, and the center table quite a handsome old piece. Mamma's old what-not stood in a corner, with shells and bottles of sand from the Jordan, a broken fan, an ivory glove box, and a strip of lichen from Florida moldering on its tri-corner shelves.

On the lichen were six little lichen owls, of graded sizes, and fallen across them a stuffed blue jay that had never been mounted.

Cassy put them all into the stove, which had stopped smoking and was beginning to burn hotly. She had turned from its roaring depths with a flushed face when she heard her name from the doorway.

"Cassy!"

Dulce was standing there. Her face was white, and immediately upon speaking tears rushed to her eyes. She came forward with a little appealing gesture, but as Cassy backed a step or two, Dulce stopped, and they stood facing each other.

"Cassy—you've got to talk to me—I had to come. Cassy, I feel so *terribly* about this!" Dulce faltered.

Cassy did not speak. Her mouth was shut in a firm line, and her finely cut nostrils moved spasmodically with the violence of her breath. Her head was slightly fallen forward; she watched Dulce closely, almost threateningly.

"Just now—with your father's death——" Dulce rushed on. "If you could know how terribly—how terribly I feel! I was up at La Lomita when Dan telephoned an hour ago—I rushed down——"

The other woman continued to stare at her, without the movement of a muscle or the flicker of an eyelid.

"Oh, I could kill myself!" Dulce whispered in despair, turning away.

"You didn't," Cassy observed somberly, lifelessly, suddenly finding her voice.

"Ah, Cassy, you shan't talk to me like that!" Dulce protested indignantly, tears running down her face.

Cassy was trembling violently, her face ashen and her eyes flaming dark blue.

"No, I suppose there is no use talking at all!" she agreed bitterly.

"Listen!" Dulce exclaimed, with an attempt at dignity. "Listen to me! It was wrong of me to—to fall in love with—to begin to care for Dan, I'll admit that! But I give you my word—I give you my *word,* Cassy, I never saw it coming! I liked him—I thought we all were having the most wonderful summer—Cassy, *please* listen to me." She stopped, despairing, and there was a little silence.

"You were my friend!" Cassy faltered, bursting into tears.

She flung aside her broom, and sat down on the old horsehair sofa, and covered her face with her smoky, dirty hands.

Instantly Dulce was beside her, one arm about Cassy's shoulders, her face close to the one Cassy persistently turned away.

"Cassy, will you just listen one moment? Won't you let me talk just for a minute? It isn't as bad as it seems, truly—truly, it's

not! I know how it must seem to you, but if you knew—if you *knew* how simply it all came about. We just played around together—like a brother and sister, until, all of a sudden——

"You remember the day you all came up to La Lomita, last summer? Well, it was that day. You were upstairs with the children."

Cassy remembered having tucked her handkerchief into the pocket of Tommy's sweater; she groped in her apron; instantly Dulce's perfumed little wisp of fine linen was in her hand.

"I don't know that it matters," Cassy said coldly, thickly.

"It *does* matter. Cassy, I had never in my life been in love before. Can you imagine that? I had never dreamed what it could mean. I was—well, after that day at La Lomita I was beside myself—I was distracted. I couldn't sleep—many and many a night I walked the floor, telling myself that it simply couldn't be true, that it couldn't be my fate to find the man I loved in—you don't believe me, but it's true!—in the husband of my friend, in a man nearly eight years younger than I.

"I ought to be ashamed of it. I'm not. It's so much the biggest—the most wonderful thing I've ever known. Cassy, even when I've cried all night, knowing that there is no happiness ahead for me and Dan, I've been so happy!

"You don't grudge me that, do you? That's all I ask. Just to know that there's a person like Dan in the world and that we did find each other. I'm going away. I'm going East almost immediately; I had planned that weeks ago.

"Monday, when you saw us down in San Francisco, Cassy, I had gone down to see about tickets, and when Dan telephoned me at the hotel, that he was coming down, I said that then I was coming straight home. I didn't want to see him—he simply waited at the boats until I came along—that wasn't my fault.

"The ranch across the road here is for sale, and I'm going away. I'll not come back for a long time. What more can I do? Cassy, won't you tell me that you forgive me and that you understand?"

"Oh, I suppose I understand," Cassy said coldly, impatiently, unsympathetically. Her face was blotched and swollen from tears,

she wiped her eyes and walked out to the kitchen, leaving the door open behind her. Dulce called after her, but Cassy did not turn, and after a minute the visitor irresolutely followed her to the kitchen. Cassy was busy with Margaret; she was seated in the old rocker with Margaret in her lap, and was removing the baby's clothing in indiscriminate handfuls.

Dulce sat down, drawing her chair near to Cassy, and said in a low quick tone:

"You *know* that there never has been anything wrong, don't you, Cassy?"

"I suppose so!" Cassy conceded indifferently and with distaste.

"I give you my word," Dulce pleaded, emphasizing the last word.

Cassy shrugged. Margaret's cold and muddy raiment had been carried away by Granny now, and Margaret was rolled in a much washed section of soft old blanket.

"Can't you see how it could happen?" Dulce persisted.

Cassy looked patiently into space. She took the plate of lunch from Granny and began to feed its contents carefully to Margaret, who snuggled luxuriously in her arms.

"Oh, I suppose so!" she conceded wearily. "Keep your arms under, Baby. I don't know," Cassy added to Dulce, "I don't know that what I see or feel matters much!"

"Don't talk like that, Cassy," Dulce reproached her, in a low tone.

She was looking her best in a rich dark blue coat with collar and cuffs of silky black fox, and a small blue hat also trimmed with fur. Her fair hair had blown loose under the hat; her red, firm cheeks were stung to brighter color even than usual by her drive.

"Don't make it harder than it has to be, Cassy," she said.

"I make it?" Cassy asked proudly. "I have nothing to do with it!"

"It's one of those things that just—happen," Dulce offered reluctantly.

"It doesn't have to happen!" Cassy answered in a hard voice.

"People do fall in love with each other," Dulce reminded her gently.

Cassy made no reply.

"You know people can't help *that,*" the other woman persisted sympathetically.

Again Cassy was silent. She flung back her head, set her jaw, and narrowed her eyes. After a minute she got to her feet and, carefully carrying the baby, crossed the kitchen and left the room without a backward look.

Dulce, after a moment of irresolution, followed her. She stopped her in the hall.

"You've got to talk to me!" she said. "What have I done? I didn't want you to know it, you never would have known it, except for having seen us in town that day."

"Please, Dulce, it's too cold for her out here!" Cassy spoke in a voice of iron; she tried to shake off the touch of Dulce's gloved hand on her arm.

"Yes, but you've got to understand that—that absolutely nothing has happened, Cassy. I'm going East now, and when I come back this'll all be forgotten. Why, what sort of a person do you think I am? I'm as sick over this as you are! The instant Dan telephoned me this morning I rushed down here; I had to see you. You're my friend, Cassy."

Cassy, tired, grimy, and shabby in her dirty kitchen apron, her face dusty from the work she had been doing and from Margaret's muddy embraces, stood stubborn and unconvinced, her face dark, her sullen look evading Dulce's pleading black eyes.

"I haven't anything to say!" she said dully.

Dulce stood for a minute, baffled and hurt, watching her mount the stairs with the baby. Then, with a subdued, sorrowful look on her vivid face, she turned and went away.

"I tried to be tactful, I tried to be friendly, but I must have bungled it somehow," she lamented to Dan that night.

They were again in the warmth and glow and comfort of her drawing room, seated, as they loved to sit, with Dulce's figure

enveloped in a great red velvet chair that set off her dark brilliant eyes and fair hair to perfection, and Dan again on a low hassock at her knee, where he could take possession of both her smooth hands and look up ardently into the face just above his own.

"Cassy was all up-stage to-night," he said. "She looked awful at dinner, and I couldn't get a word out of her."

"She feels terribly, Dan. And I'd rather have cut my hand off than have this happen—have her find out."

"She's not the only one who feels terribly," he said slowly.

"No, of course not. But of course she blames us. Funny to blame people for what they feel, as if you could help what you feel, Dan, isn't it?"

"Here's what I try to think, Dulce: I say to myself, 'Suppose it was Cassy who had come to care for somebody, would I feel so terribly?' And of course, I wouldn't."

"You idiot, you wouldn't, because you'd have me in the back of your mind! But suppose things had been going along very quietly at home, and you never dreamed—— You're not paying any attention to me!"

"Because you're so sumptuously beautiful, my darling."

"Do you think I'm pretty, Danny? I'm not vain, you know—at least, I don't think I am."

"You're not in the least vain; Cass has said so a thousand times!"

"Well, anyway, whether I am or not, I confess to a sneaking little pleasure that you should think I'm pretty!"

"Ah, dearest, you're so much more than that! Why, anyone can be pretty; girls in candy stores are pretty. But you're so incredibly sweet, you're so soft, and perfumy, and lovely—you're everything any man ever wanted in a woman, Dulce!"

"Do you know what my real name is, Dan?"

"Dulce?"

"No, that was just what my father called me. My real name is Miranda—isn't that awful? Miranda Maria Dolores Morado —*isn't* that awful? When I was a little girl I used to worry for

fear I'd have to name a child that some day. But—" there was a quick catch of her breath—"but there never was a baby, Dan."

He was silent; he kissed the white hand he held.

"Oh, Dan," she said in an aching voice, "if I'm being selfish in this, for the few days before I go away, just remember how much I've been cheated out of! Frank was cruel to me, and Lou was so many, many years older!"

There was a long silence. Dan kissed her hand; he did not look at her.

"We've got to belong to each other," he said, in a grating voice, after awhile.

"That can't be, Dan," she whispered, frightened.

They were both trembling. After a minute, with a whitened face and wet eyelashes, she got up suddenly and caught his hand.

"Come, you must go. No use talking like this!"

And three days later, steadily and briefly, she told him that she was going to New York.

Dan was helpless. He came up to the stock farm and saw her making preparations for departure; the day came when he took her down to the city to the train. But in spite of the smart trunks and the long strip of tickets, green and pink, which she discussed with him, he could not make himself believe that Dulce actually was going away. No telephones, no plans, no more joy and sorrow of meeting. Just blankness.

When the day of departure came they drove down the twenty miles to Vallejo and went on the boat. Dulce's bags were left in the car, and she and Dan went upstairs and found seats in the big, warm, comfortable parlor, from which they could look out at the water.

They talked of themselves through the two-hour trip, and to both it seemed no longer than ten minutes. They talked quietly, Dulce, in her brown homespun traveling dress and her small brown hat and brown furs, looking oddly grave and subdued, and Dan wheeled about on the seat beside her, staring into her face. Her gloves, holding the beautiful brown handbag, were white; she looked down at them, looked up into his eyes, spoke hesitat-

ingly. The boat was almost deserted; it tilted gently on the gray waters, the colorless pictures framed by the wide windows went up and down. Gulls wheeled about the boat.

"You'll write to me, Dulce?"

"I think not, Dan. Not for awhile, anyway."

"You can surely trust me that much, dear?"

"Yes—but I can't trust myself!"

Her unsmiling look made his senses swim. She was at her loveliest to-day, gentle and affectionate. When they docked in San Francisco his heart sank strangely, as if a vise gripped it; he took her heavy bag, and she carried the little brown one of lapped, shiny alligator scales, and they walked across the Embarcadero together, between the newsboys and the hurrying homegoers, the street cars, trucks, and taxicabs, and all the noise, odor, color, and movement of the long waterfront.

The ferry clock said six.

"I'll take the six-ten, Dan."

"I'm going across with you," he said doggedly.

"Oh, Dan, ought you?"

"I'm going."

And again they were on the boat together, but this time it was a dirty, crowded boat, smelling of bilge water and cheap cigar smoke, and the trip was brief—but twenty minutes. Then Dan helped her find car "N-22" on the long train and compartment "C." They snapped up the lights in the small, orderly, green-velvet room and heard other travelers chattering and laughing all about them.

Dulce nervously put her little alligator skin handbag on the seat and took off her brown hat, and he saw the bright fair masses of her hair. Her eyes were full of tears now.

Dan kissed her, his arms tight about her, and she put her hands on his shoulders without a word.

Then he walked away, down the long, cindery, grimy black tracks over which bright lights were shining, and past the oncoming rush of arrivals from the half-past six boat, and back onto the *Encinal*, that smelled of bilge and cigar smoke still, and was

littered with abandoned afternoon papers, pink sheets and green.

Alcatraz went by, and the ferry clock came into sight again, this time saying twenty minutes past seven, and a great desolateness held the world. The pain in Dan's heart was so acute that he could hardly walk; he heard Dulce's voice, the air was full of her, loving, warm, sweet, sorrowing, in her brown hat, with her brown furs and bag.

Dan had parked his car at the Vallejo ferry place. He got in and shifted controls; the obedient power responded. He remembered the sober look with which she had said, "Yes, but I can't trust myself!" She couldn't trust herself to write him because she loved him so much. . . .

That night he only told Cassy briefly that he had had to go to East Oakland on business, but the next day he announced Dulce's departure.

"Yes, I know. It was in the paper yesterday," Cassy said coldly.

"In case you're interested," Dan pursued, nettled, and turning the knife in his heart, "I went down to the city with her yesterday and saw her off. There was no one else to do it."

"She has about a thousand aunts and cousins down there," Cassy offered.

A silence; he flushed angrily.

"Well, anyway, I thought you might want to know," he muttered.

"Oh, when you didn't come home to dinner I knew anyway," Cassy assured him lightly.

"I telephoned you that I wouldn't be home to dinner!"

"I didn't say you didn't!" And in her panicky heart she added, "This is awful! We sound like a couple of children in a school yard!"

"Well, why do you think she went away?" Dan burst out angrily. "It was to spare you! She feels terribly about the way you feel!"

"She's very kind," Cassy said acidly, in a shaking voice. She concentrated her attention upon the little button-waist whose garters she was reinforcing.

"You don't have to say it in that tone!" Dan, from heartache and bewilderment, said resentfully.

Cassy made a conscious and almost violent effort not to speak. But fatigue and nerves and her outraged sense of justice were too much for her, and in a level, icy voice she said:

"There seems to be nothing I can say about Dulce that is right."

Chapter XV

It was December now; at eight o'clock every night the silence and blackness of midnight settled on the old farmhouse; wind whined about the eaves, and when the wind was still, wild airs were still moving in the dark, and the windmill turned and splashed outside in the yard.

Cassy would establish herself after dinner in the newly opened sitting room, beside the wood stove. The fire would roar, and the thin sheet-iron sides of the "airtight" turn clear vermilion color. Sometimes acrid smoke lingered in the air, the flue was not working perfectly yet, but it was good to know that the room was steadily warming. Dan would loiter along the bookshelves, looking vaguely at Kipling and O. Henry, rejecting them all. Cassy always left the hall door ajar in case either child should cry; the breath from the dark hall would be cold and close-smelling.

Presently Dan would settle himself in the chair she had established for him opposite her own, under the lamp. He would open *Heart of the West,* but he could not read. She would see him look off the book, note the long pauses between the turning of the pages. He made no answer if she spoke: he did not hear her.

Wood would fall in the grate; dry leaves rustle against the outer walls of the flimsy old wooden house. The evening would pass without another word.

Mid-winter was upon them; both children got heavy colds and coughed distressingly at night; Cassy got a cold herself, jumping in and out of her warm bed to run to their cribs.

There was no enthusiastic visitor in the kitchen now when Dan got home in the evening darkness; there were no luxurious dinners across the road with three-handed bridge to follow. Cassy looked delicate, thin and brown, and when whooping-cough swept the village and her little black-clad mother came up for a long visit to help nurse Tom and Margaret through the epidemic, a sort of madness of heart-break and fatigue seized upon Dan's wife, and she felt herself utterly unable to face her problem or

to make any effort to carry the burden of this state of affairs any longer.

Dan was changed. He was silent, patient, bored, all the time, except when bursts of a new irritation, a new gloominess possessed him. He no longer paid any attention to the children; he accorded Cassy only an apathetic semblance of interest. To Mrs. Pringle he extended a cold, labored politeness; he read much, this winter, and made his reading and the children's coughing an excuse for moving himself to a room across the hall. Both cribs were put in Cassy's room.

It was discussed as a temporary measure, because Dan was working so hard at the garage, and Cassy's nights were broken. But when he had established himself in his separate apartment Cassy felt an anguish, a loneliness, that frightened her with all the force of an omen. From the daring, happy first hours of her marriage, in the old house in Shotwell Street, she had loved every detail of her proud position as Dan's wife. Waking in the morning, talking late at night, free to share the thrilling intimacy of a room together—all this had been a part of her new estate, a visible proof of her proprietorship of Dan. Sickness, responsibilities, worries had all seemed only to accentuate the holiness of it.

She knew herself over-burdened, nervous, and half sick now, she knew that her buoyancy and beauty had been eclipsed together, but that only meant that she needed him, wanted him the more.

Granny Choate, always a bird of passage, had migrated south with the first frost. The Japanese woman was neither reliable nor trained; Cassy had to struggle with a very nightmare of domestic work at best, to which the addition of her own illness and the children's was unbearable. Coughing and shivering, she prepared a comfortable room off the dining room for a maid, and Dan, angrily and hopelessly, tried to find one, but the prospect of general work on a ranch in winter, with two small children in the family, did not allure the town girls, who had all the piece work they wanted at the factories and free evenings and Sundays

to boot. A whole group of Swedes were promised for the spring, and Cassy contributed her two hundred dollars passage money with some of the other women, but the prospect seemed remote.

And meanwhile she had everything to do. Her feet ached and burned at night, her back was an arc of pain. Dishes and trays, ashes, saucepans, and crumbs rode her like a ghastly dream.

Dan, not interested, was at home very little and but indifferently helpful; Mrs. Pringle, diffident and inefficient, did what she could while she was there. Yet Cassy felt relief when her mother went away for a day or two now and then. In January there were twenty-seven days of steady rain, and Tom and Margaret coughed "like professionals," Cassy said, wheezing herself as she laughed despairingly.

"Never mind, we'll get out of all this as soon as the weather breaks! We've been through worse."

Her laundryman had strike troubles; the wash was delayed. Cassy, unkempt and exhausted, always seemed to be explaining about the missing towels and sheets. "Things won't dry at all this weather!"

"I suppose we shall live through this, simply because we won't die!" she said one night at Margaret's crib. It was midnight, but the child's coughing had brought her grandmother from bed in the next room. Cassy, looking ghastly in her spotted wrapper, was propping Margaret on the palm of one hand, straightening the tumbled covers with the other.

"Baby, won't you try to get to sleep before the next cough comes?" she begged forlornly.

"She can't help it, Mother!" Tommy said tearfully, from his crib, the protest bringing on a paroxysm of his own.

"No, I know she can't, darling. Ah, now, don't *you* cry, Margaret, because that starts you off again! It was only that Mother was so tired, Tom, and she'd just got off to sleep."

"It seems to me that last wood he cut must have been wet, Cassy. That stove smokes terribly."

And all the time Dan so changed! So polite, so remote, so

utterly bored. Cassy tried to be generous to him, she tried to think it perfectly excusable in him to have been bewitched by Dulce. Dan was so simple—he plunged into new experiences so boyishly.

But the constant sense of injustice, or resentment and humiliation, made it very hard. Cassy grew irritable and suspicious, and many a dinner and breakfast table in the Pringle farmhouse was enlivened only by her mother's feeble efforts at conversation.

Every day brought its pinpricks. She knew that he wrote to Dulce every few days and heard from her almost that often. She knew that in the hardest strain of the winter, when both children were in bed and she herself was barely able to drag herself about, he had wired flowers to Dulce in New York.

Even when she succeeded in throwing off the bitter anger that beset her for a time, it rose all the stronger for the repression, and angry words burst from her in spite of herself.

He began, quite rationally and simply, to say things, to expound theories that distressed her and provoked her into replies. All roads seemed to lead to quarrels in these days.

"Here's a heavenly morning at last, Dan, and I think the children both could get out about eleven, if I bundled them up," she might begin. "How about cleaning the back yard?"

His polite, oblique look over the morning paper.

"Oh, I'm sorry. But I thought I'd help you here for awhile and then get over to the garage."

"On Sunday? Aren't the boys there?"

"Yes, they're there. But there's something I had to attend to."

"A letter to Dulce!" her quick suspicions would flash. But sometimes she could quiet them sufficiently to say, "I thought we could have a big bonfire and all get warmed up cleaning up that rubbish."

"I'm sorry." Lifeless, uninterested, civil. Cassy would feel a sudden desire to slap him. Her dream of one of their happy old mornings, with babies toddling about on richly scented spring grass, and gray smoke rising into timid February sunshine, would vanish. No more laughter, no more gypsy lunches for the Wal-

laces, no more glorious work and chatter, dirtiness and hunger, to be followed by baths, food, rest, and utter evening content.

Nothing existed for him, here at home, any more. The thought, the memory, the longing for Dulce had eaten into his soul; he was like a man under a spell.

"Dan, you have no right to treat us all so, you have no right to make me so unhappy! What have I done?"

His sullen, stubborn, all-enduring look.

"Well, what have I?"

"At least you've fallen in love with a woman who isn't your wife, and now you're making your wife and babies pay for it, and it's not fair!"

No anger from Dan, no outburst of his old rage. She would have welcomed that. But a patient, far-away stare of puzzlement.

"What can I do about it, Cassy?"

"But do you think a man has a right to be attracted to a woman who has money and beauty and no responsibilities and nothing to do, when his own wife—who would like pretty things and luxury——"

"Hold on a minute. We've been over all this before."

"I know we have! But it doesn't make it any the less true!"

"Marriage," Dan might begin, with that new philosophy that she found so hateful, "is a business proposition, instituted by a lot of business experts, in the Middle Ages, for the protection of property rights. Romance about it all you want to, but don't ever try to pretend that religion or morality have anything to do with it! It ropes a man in when he's good and young, and there he is for life. He can't look at another woman; he's branded."

"You're talking like a perfect idiot!"

"All right, maybe I am." And he would turn again to the sporting sheet.

"If things were your way, Dan, why, every married man and woman would be looking around all the time for another partner Nothing would be safe!"

"Safe? How d'you mean safe?"

"Well, what about the children?"

"Ah, there you are, the economic question again! That's just what I told you, that the whole thing is based on business."

And over and over again, "Love, honor, and obey! Why, nobody but a fool could promise to love all his life! You might just as well promise to like olives all your life!"

One glorious February Saturday, leaving the house after breakfast, he stopped in the yard. Margaret and Tommy were racing about, mad with warmth and spring sweetness and freedom; Cassy had a battered, dark tin pan in her hand; she was stooping to scatter mixed meal and sour milk and bread to a fluffy group of baby chickens. The mother hen, in a peak-roofed pen, squawked anxiously a few feet away.

The air was blue and warming fast, although frost still filmed the north side of the fences and barns. Apple blossoms were dazzling pink and white overhead; the willow was a fountain of emerald whips. There was a milky smell of grass and loam in the air; bees buzzed with a summery sound over the opening cherry blooms.

"Dulce got home yesterday," Dan announced abruptly.

Cassy looked up quickly. Then her face hardened and she looked away through narrowed lids, her brown thin hand still automatically scattering the damp meal.

"I thought I'd see her to-day," Dan continued doggedly.

She shrugged and made no answer.

"If you have no objection," the man added.

"What objection could I possibly have?"

A silence. Then Dan said, with a sort of forced politeness,

"Would you care to go?"

She had no servant; her mother had gone down to the city reluctantly to attend to some business. Cassy's glance at her husband seemed to enclose her shabby, weary self, her worn hands, her clamorous babies, the dishes, the dust, the crumbs, the ash-embedded stove.

"I'd rather not!" she stammered, suddenly choked with the

unwelcome tears that were always in ambush now, ready to overwhelm her.

She stood looking after him as he went away.

All day long, all through the trembling perfect hours that brought in the early Western spring, she shook with inner rage and bitterness. Fury drove her to and fro, from sink to table, from stove to dooryard, like a woman possessed.

"She's pouring him tea now—silver and crystal—and flowers, and talk about what they've both been enduring.

'They have no right—they have no right to do it!

"A woman like that ought to be driven out of a town!"

That night she asked resolutely:

"How is Dulce?"

"Oh, fine!" Dan answered, too naturally.

"Did she have a nice trip?"

"She seemed glad to get back."

That was all. Later Cassy heard him singing as he undressed in his room across the hall. While she was arranging the sheet that made a croup-tent over Margaret and setting oils and kettle in readiness, he came to her door.

"Don't miss the moonlight, Cassy. Take a look from your window. It's full to-night."

"A—roop—roop—roop! A—roop!" coughed Margaret. And she ended it on the long wail of the sleepy child, "Ah! A-h-h-h-h, Mother!"

"Yes, my sweetheart, Mother's right here! Put her little head down again."

The familiar smell of creosote began to drift through the warm air of the bedroom.

"If I had Charley, Mom, I'd ride standin' up."

"Don't wake Sister, darling."

"Is she croupy?"

"Well, she seemed a little bit choked up. Have you Tubby there?"

"He's on his chain, cantjer see'um down there, watchin' me?"

"Oh, sure enough, there he is! Hello, Tubby, you take good

care of my boy. Do you want a drink, Tom, while Mother's up?"

"Mother, are there really bad Indians?"

"Not now. They're all on reservations, and they don't bother people any more. Don't spill it, dear."

"But then who can Tubby protect me from, Mother?"

"Oh? Oh, coyotes!

"What I need," she thought, "is a good hot bath to take all this weariness and stiffness away."

The bathroom, in the old-fashioned house, was down at the end of the hall. It was as cold as an ice box; the probability of there being hot water at this hour of night was slight. Aching, cold, wearily aware of the ashes, onions, dish water, and croup oil that had punctuated her day and scented hair and hands, Cassy crept into bed.

After that Dan was rarely home for dinner. Night after night he spent the dinner hour with Dulce, and Cassy grew accustomed to having the meal with her mother and the children only. He made no excuses, and Cassy made none for him to the older woman; Mrs. Pringle made no comments whatsoever.

One foggy warm March morning she challenged him at breakfast. Her mother was out in the yard with Margaret and Tommy.

"Dan," she said suddenly, "would you like to be free?"

He looked up, surprised; she saw the color creep into his face.

"You know I'd like to be free," he answered quietly.

It was Cassy's turn to flush. She said quickly:

"Well, there are ways!"

She was trembling. Her heart beating hard with fright. Their eyes met.

"Oh, why talk about it?" Dan asked impatiently. "You know we won't do it!"

"Do what?"

"Oh, we won't get a divorce," he said gruffly. "So why waste time talking about it?"

It staggered her, and for a moment she could not speak. Presently she swallowed, with a dry throat, and said as naturally as she could:

"I don't know why we shouldn't with all the rest, Dan. It's happening every day."

"You know very well that we can't," he persisted.

"Why not?"

"Oh, well—the kids—everything."

"It might be better than letting things go on as they are," Cassy observed with deadly significance. "People are talking," she added.

He looked up, scowling.

"In the village?"

"But what did you expect, Dan? You're up there all day, you're never at home any more. Everyone sees it, of course."

"Maybe I expected them to mind their own business."

"People never do. You know that they can't understand a man's treating his wife as you're treating me."

"Lovely, charitable, churchgoing lot, that's what they are!"

"It isn't only the churchgoing lot that can't forgive it, Dan."

"Women don't, maybe," he conceded sneeringly. "Men do."

"Why, they do not!" Cassy protested, with sudden spirit. "And it isn't religious scruples that keep people from separating, anyway," she went on, warming. "You have no religion, you never go to church."

"No, but I live in a community that looks down on a divorced woman!" Dan interrupted in a bitterly contemptuous tone. " 'Oh, she got So-and-so's husband away from her!'—that's what the women say. Lots of them have sold themselves for money, but that's all right, so long as a minister has stood over them."

"Ah, Dan, how can you talk so foolishly!" Cassy exclaimed sadly.

"It's not foolish," he muttered sullenly, in the silence.

"Danny, this doesn't sound like you!" she said, trembling.

Leaving her place, she drew a chair close beside him and laid her hand over his on the table. Her brown, thin, eager young face, with tears misting her long eyelashes, was close to his own.

"Don't you like your old wife any more, Dan?"

Suddenly he put his elbows on the table and covered his face with his hands.

"I don't know what's the matter with me, Cassy!" he said in despair.

"Dan," she said presently, "you don't really want a divorce, do you?"

"I don't want to hurt you and the kids," he said stubbornly, in a hard tone.

Her color flamed up, and there was an edge to her voice.

"What makes you think it would hurt me and the kids?" she asked, beginning to tremble again.

"She says it would, and she says that a lot of these old grannies here in Napa wouldn't bow to her in the street. As if they and their nasty little spying ideals of morality mattered!" Dan growled.

Cassy sat back, locking her brown fingers together, resting them lightly on the table. She felt fury, like a flame, within her.

"You go back to Dulce," she said levelly, unemotionally, "and tell her that I sent you and that I'm perfectly happy about it. You can get a divorce any day you like, Dan—to-day, if you like!"

He dropped his hands and stared at her in bewilderment.

"Cassy," he said after awhile, a little hoarsely, "have you thought about it? Is—is that the thing for us to do?"

It was her puzzled little boy again, turning to his Cassy for advice and guidance. Her heart plunged for one second of saving weakness, one instant of vertigo that might have changed both their lives.

But Cassy's blood was up. She could not reason now, she could not hesitate, or those devastating floods of tears that she was always fighting would engulf her.

"Do you think I want you if you're tired of me?" she demanded. "Do you think I like to be alone here, night after night, while you're up with her, at La Lomita, making love to her?"

"But you—you would be miserably unhappy, divorced?" he said, after a troubled pause, during which he stared at her.

"I'm not very happy now," she reminded him quickly.

"She—" he was avoiding Dulce's name—"she is always talking about you, Cassy. It just breaks her heart to think of you as being sad over this."

"I shouldn't be sad at all over a divorce," Cassy assured him, in a light, hard tone.

"But you've always talked—you've always said——"

"Why," she said, her voice shaking, her eyes resolutely smiling, "I'd have the children and Mamma."

"So that your life wouldn't be ruined?" he asked doubtfully, anxiously, with the blindness of the man who loves another woman.

"Not at all."

Dan sat pondering, a scowl on his handsome, anxious young face.

"Cass," he said presently, "if something like this hadn't happened it would have killed her. Or she would have killed herself!"

"Dulce?"

"Yes. She blames herself, terribly, you know."

"Oh, why should she?" Cassy asked politely.

He saw nothing.

"Well, she does. She never has cared for anyone before."

"So she told me."

Cassy rose. "Just one thing," she said steadily, in a quietly conversational voice. "Spare me the details. Go now, Dan, today, and let me know where you want your things sent. Only —I wouldn't go to La Lomita, for the children's sake! Or, no, go there of course if you want to, it's no concern of mine!

"I'll talk to your lawyer, I'll agree to anything you think best. But don't—don't think you have to see me, apologize to me. I never want to see you again after you walk out of that door! Perhaps I'll change some time and want to see you—I don't know. But unless I do, spare me scenes. Spare me—Dulce.

"Good-bye, Dan."

She walked to the door. Dan did not speak. Cassy glanced back

at him dispassionately, opened the door, and went into the hall.

It was cold, after the warm dining room. She went up the cold stairs quickly, evenly, and into her bedroom. Her bed and Margaret's crib were tumbled and cool, the window was open, and the fire in the little stove had gone out.

Cassy went to a window and looked down at the yard. It was filled with softly undulating fog; the willows and peppers were mere shadows, rounded and mysterious, in the soft warm mist. The fences were gone, there was no windmill, no descending meadow slope dotted with cattle and oaks. There was nothing but fog.

Tommy was playing with his red wheelbarrow near the kitchen door, Margaret had wandered to the kennel and was strangling an uneasy puppy in her fat, loving little hands. While Cassy watched, the screen door of the kitchen banged and Dan came out.

Her heart rose in her breast and plunged like a frightened thing.

Dan stopped and picked Margaret up and kissed her. When he set her down among the puppies again she instantly resumed her play. Tommy came up to his father, and Cassy saw him jump Tommy to the running board of his car and put some questions to the child, to which Tommy responded eagerly.

Then Tommy went back to his play, too, and Dan stood by the car for a full minute—for another minute—pondering.

After that he got in and started the engine, and the car wheeled on the old dirt roadway, turned out the side gate, and swept away under the two great bare maples into the all-enveloping fog. For a minute the sound of its passage lingered, then that too was gone.

Silence followed. Cassy continued to stand motionless at the open window.

"It can't be as simple as that," she said aloud, after awhile, in a frightened tone. "Oh, Danny! Oh, my God!"

Margaret, below, argued and struggled with the puppies. Tommy continued to push his little red wheelbarrow busily to

and fro. A solitary chicken, parading suspiciously about the back yard, gave vent to a desolate caw. The fog boomed and billowed softly over the bare, trodden earth under the willows.

"This can't be the end, for you and me, Dan," Cassy said.

The day went on, and she moved through its familiar duties. She put her room in order, crossed the hall, and worked busily over Dan's bed, gathered towels, straightened chairs.

She did not cry all that long, lonely day, nor in the wakeful night. But a day or two later, cleaning the big kitchen closet with that frenzy of feverish energy that possesses women who dare not think, she chanced to stretch an exploring hand into the darkness of the top shelf, and found something there, and brought it to the light, wondering what it was.

The instant she could see it she remembered. It was an egg poacher, a silly, cumbersome thing that she had used experimentally once or twice. She had long ago abandoned it as extravagant of time and heat.

She stood on the chair in the dim pantry looking at it. And again she saw Mission Street, and the bright evening lights shining into the eyes of a boy and girl who loved each other, again she felt the enchantment and exhilaration of that bewildering night before their marriage, when she and Dan had sallied forth from the old Dresden Hotel to taste the first intoxicating draught of their love and youth and independence.

On the day they had found the Cannon house, long before they had fearfully rejoiced over the coming of Tommy, Dan had found this silly little poacher and had bought it in a first stirring of the householder's pride in domestic perfection.

The pain of it tore and clawed at her heart like the teeth of an animal. She was a girl again, poor in everything but love, and rich—rich to surfeiting in that. She was cooking, planning, dreaming for her man, flying up the long shabby stairs of the Shotwell Street house with a song bubbling up irrepressibly from her heart, and odd packages, greasy and damp in flimsy paper bags, under her arm. Her half onion, her bowl of gravy, her prunes soaking in cold water—all these were the tools with

which she wrought the magic of the evening hour, when Dan would come climbing up, hungry, weary, and cold, from the bleak windy city streets to their eyrie of happiness and love.

Cassy got down from the chair and staggered rather than walked to the kitchen table, and laid the little piece of rusted tinware there. In the back of her mind pulses beat, like the steady, roaring, rising pulses of the drowning.

It was a hot, still morning; the kitchen doors were open, and Kito, who had no feeling about infections, had let streams of flies into the kitchen. There was a bowl of cherries on the table; Margaret was in her high chair, expectant of luncheon; Tommy was crawling after a box which he pushed slowly ahead of him across the new linoleum.

"They mustn't see me cry," Cassy's thoughts ran, terrified. "Where can I go? Tommy'll follow me.

"The room back of the harness room—where I used to keep guinea pigs."

They saw her run hastily across the green dooryard, and disappear into the shadow of the old barn. Tommy's intent to follow was quickly distracted by the sight of the strange utensil on the table. He seized the egg poacher rapturously; it became his favorite toy.

Chapter XVI

A WEEK later Dan went to a stock farm just across the Nevada border; a place with which La Lomita had had dealings for many years. He slept in a bunkhouse, rode all day long, and in the late afternoons wrote letters to Dulce in the O. Henry strain. To himself he seemed rather like a person playing a part, a little dull and dazed when he thought of Cassy and the children at the farmhouse, but thrilling and alive again the moment the vision of Dulce and the ordered beauty and greenness and whiteness of La Lomita came into his mind.

His lawyer had gone to see Cassy, and his report had cheered Dan and Dulce immensely. Mrs. Wallace had been most reasonable and matter-of-fact, stipulating merely that she should have full custody of the children. And that, as Mr. Wysong had pointed out to Dan, would have been the natural disposition of such young children in any case. Mrs. Wallace had no objection to occasional visits from Mr. Wallace to Thomas and Margaret, if he liked. Her father's will having deeded her the ranch house now being used by her as a residence, and her mother's further arrangement for income, made it agreeable to Mrs. Wallace to waive alimony. For their children Mr. Wallace could make quarterly deposits in the local bank, since he so desired.

Dan wrote Cassy a letter regarding her obliging attitude in these details, a letter of which Dulce highly approved. Cassy did not acknowledge it.

As a matter of fact, she was sick with rage, fear, amazement, bewilderment, and these emotions carried her proudly through the first three months of earthquake, when all Napa peered and gossiped, and her mother shed mournful and helpless tears. Cassy went about with her head high and her heart seething with arguments and counter arguments, in long imaginary conversations with Dan.

There was a quiet newspaper article; sometimes the women she knew best came to see Cassy, in the spring afternoons, and touched upon the matter shyly and furtively.

"You know we all think that you are behaving simply magnificently about this, Cassy!"

"Oh, thank you, Mary."

"Where is Dan now?"

"He's still at Topanga, in Nevada."

"Did you know," the caller might venture, further, "that she had been up there?"

"I supposed she had."

That was all. Cassy never asked sympathy, but the knowledge that she had it sustained her, just the same.

But as the summer weeks went by empty pride and her neighbors' sympathy turned to ashes in her mouth. She and her mother drove away from Napa—south, always south. Cassy found herself spending long hours staring out at the blue ocean below Santa Barbara, heedless of Margaret's babbling, on the sand beside her, blind to the trophies that Tommy brought in from the sea.

She walked and swam and basked on the beach, but a deep languor seemed to possess her, an almost frightened lifelessness and apathy. The winter was over now, and herself and the children in the best of health; there was no more money trouble. But Cassy had never suffered in her life as she was suffering now. She had not known before that a woman could carry a heart racked with pain, day after day and hour after hour, and find no alleviation anywhere.

In her thoughts she wrote long letters to Dan, reproachful, pleading, angry. But even while she composed them she hated herself for their weakness and knew that they never would be written or sent.

"What I can't understand," Mrs. Pringle complained, over and over again, "is you and Dan *separating!* Why, goodness gracious, married people are always quarreling, and it doesn't mean anything. Your Grandfather and Grandmother Pringle used to fight now and then, but they never thought of separating! Seems so funny."

"There wasn't so much divorce in Grandma's day."

"No, and a good thing, too!" Mrs. Pringle might snap, with the air of one who scores a telling point in controversy.

"They quarreled in those days, Mamma, but afterward there was nothing else to do but make it up."

"There weren't women sneaking about trying to get other women's husbands, either."

"Isn't it perhaps that divorce creates that class of woman?"

"Well, they ought to be ashamed to admit it, if it does!"

"Divorce makes it perfectly legitimate to break up a family, Mother, if you can."

"Cassy, I can't bear to hear you talk that immoral way!"

"It's not immoral. It's perfectly true. I'm just telling you what Dulce's viewpoint is."

"Well, it doesn't seem to me it's your place to defend Dulce Varney!"

And Cassy's desperate laugh.

"My dear mother, I'm not defending her! I'm trying as hard as you are to understand it!"

"Gertrude seems to be so sensible about these things!" Mrs. Pringle would say, and Cassy reflected sometimes upon the difference between the daughter who has never left home and the daughter who has been mother and wife. Yet this wavering, this faint, complaining protest that her mother kept up was love, too, Cassy knew.

They went back to the ranch in August, and on the first evening there, overwhelmed by the emptiness of the rooms that had known Dan's laughter and footsteps, appalled at the endless vista of a future without him, the responsibility of her fatherless girl and boy hers alone, Cassy sat down to write to him.

It had been a hot, burning day, smelling of peaches and ripening apples, and they had all missed the foggy quiet of the shore. But evening brought cooling airs, and the little supper table on the side porch was a cheerful one. Mrs. Pringle felt happier, and picked a bowl of blackberries with her own veiny little hands, trailing along the savage wall of the vines, with bees hanging in the streamers of late sunlight where the fruit was thick. Margaret

staggered after her; Tommy had his own basket to fill, and Cassy, setting the table, chopping ice, going and coming between the porch and the kitchen, felt a sort of homely comfort come into her heart. The feeling that she must write Dan came to her suddenly, and it seemed to her that that letter was the solution, that all this had to be, up to this point, to make possible to-night's letter to Dan.

It was before her like a column of smoke, in the sweet warm summer twilight, and when she came downstairs in the dusk at half-past seven, having settled the children in bed, it moved before her like a pillar of fire. She rummaged in a trunk in the hall for her mother's cards; shook out a sandy bathing suit or two, decided to leave the rest of the unpacking until the morning. Mrs. Pringle was made comfortable by a wide open window with her light and her solitaire, and Cassy established herself at the big center table, with paper and pen.

"Writing Gertrude, dear?"

"I thought I would."

Cassy's green pen began to move; she hesitated, scratched again.

DAN DEAR:

We got home from Santa Barbara to-night. We had a cottage right on the dunes, and the children both look like different creatures. Margaret is just bursting out of last winter's flannel nighties, and I'm only waiting to start the new ones until the weather is cooler.

Mother's playing "Spider," of course. She gets it, now and then, and goes on to some other kind of patience. But she always starts with "Spider," and always says, "Let's see, now, how did Dan say this went?"

Fussy is here at my feet, moaning with sheer joy. Not that he didn't go with us to the shore, of course, but his joy in getting home is too much for him. Grouch is out in the barn with six kittens—darlings. My Swedes have come, great big rawboned, gentle-voiced, intelligent creatures, and one of the women starts in to-morrow. They want to rent the upper farm, and I told them I'd give them three months' rent to paper and clean. They seem darlings. Mine is Inga

Tranesen, as beautiful as a girl on a handkerchief box, real blonde. We advanced two hundred to bring them, remember? so there is quite complicated bookkeeping still ahead.

Everything at the ranch looks beautiful, yellow poplars, apples, shrubs all burning with color, we are having an early fall, but after all, to-morrow is September. The horses, cows, pigs, doves—everything fine. And the children were ecstatic to get back.

We left day before yesterday, stayed one night in Monterey, last night at the Fairmont, and got the nine boat up, so I've had all day to rest and fuss, and am in, all but one trunk, which just came. Divine weather, so soft and fragrant, and *thin,* somehow.

I got some dresses in town, and have one on—my first color. A soft sort of dimity, with ruffles, fine black and white, and wide lavender stripes. It's delicious, this hot weather. And getting the children to bed, I got my hair splashed so that now it's very slick and neat.

They're both so good, and Margaret as round and soft and sweet as a little butterball. She's lovely, all soapy and powdery, after her bath. Tom's still the masher you used to call him, when he sat up and watched us in the kitchen of the Fulton Street flat. He's as much company to me as a grown-up, and Mother, who was quite lackadaisical, what with Papa's death and everything last spring, has cheered up. She is awfully sweet to me. I'm writing at the table in the living room, windows wide open, hot, hot day but cooling now, and Mother at the window Tom fell out of. Mother's very much embarrassed to find herself rich, after asking Papa for fifty centses for years, and has given me quite a lot of stuff—bonds and shares. She says it makes her nervous, and she has lots more. My sister Gertrude is only my half sister, you know, and is separately taken care of. I have to go down to the bank to-morrow, but I'm rolling in wealth. Joe wants me to turn the car in for a touring, same make, because I always have Mother and a raft of Light Infantry with me.

Dan dear, I think we've been fools long enough. We're older now, and I know you've been suffering during this time as I have. I want you to come back, I don't care what we have to do, explain, take back, apologize for, cancel. I don't care what people think or what Dulce thinks. I'm your wife, sitting here in my new dimity dress loving you, wanting you, thinking about you—with your children asleep upstairs, and your Airedale at my feet, and your grapes and

apples and plums and pears all ready to be gathered—and your Margaret mashing her wet little kisses on your photograph every night.

Will you come back, dear? I couldn't go to bed, somehow, without asking you, without saying that there's nothing we can't forget and forgive, and nothing but happiness ahead.

She signed it "Cassy," and dated it, "August thirty-first, home."

It was mailed the next day, and Cassy waited five—six—eight days for Dan's telegram. She haunted the post office now, and every car halting under the yellowed trees of the road, outside the garden, brought her heart into her mouth, and every telephone bell.

"Maybe he's left Topanga," she said uneasily on the ninth day.

On the tenth she was answered. She was looking indifferently through the tepid columns of one of the town's two newspapers when the names caught her eyes.

Married. Varney–Wallace. In New York City, August thirty-first, at five o'clock P. M., in Saint Simon's Church, Miranda Dolores Maria (Dulce) Varney, and Daniel Wallace, both of Napa, California.

Cassy, standing by the porch table, continued to stand, motionless, for a long minute, looking stonily ahead. Her brown fingers crushed the flimsy sheet slowly, but she did not look at it.

After awhile she sat down at the table, dazedly, still staring into space, passing her hand across her forehead, moistening her lips with a dry mouth. A yellow leaf drifted down through the clear, soft autumn air, a chicken clucked suddenly close to her feet, and from the orchard beside the barn she could hear the children's voices and Fussy's bark. Inga moved in the kitchen, and the rich smell of baking cake came out to mingle with the harvest smells of the afternoon and the scent of burning leaves.

"Well," Cassy said clearly, in a dead silence, "that's that."

Chapter XVII

"WHAT you looking for, honey?"

Dulce Wallace whipped the morning newspaper behind her and faced her husband with a guilty little laugh.

"Wondering what interested you so much at breakfast!" she confessed.

"In the paper?"

"Yes."

"Why, I don't remember," Dan said vaguely, with a faint frown of concentration on his face.

"Well, something interested you, Dan, and you sort of jumped," Dulce persisted, nodding her head up and down at him accusingly.

"Can't remember what it was!"

"Honestly, can't you?" she asked more seriously, dropping the paper, and coming to slip her hand through his arm and look up at him lovingly.

"In the paper this morning? Nope."

"I wish I could believe you, you divvle."

"Now, listen," Dan began impatiently, squaring her about with big hands on her shoulders.

"No, no, no, don't scold me!" pleaded Dulce, laughing. "I can't help it. If I think that something in the paper interests you I'm mad until I know what it is! You ought to be glad of it," she went on, in fond reproach. "You ought to see it as a proof of love."

"You idiot!" he said, kissing her.

"Idiot, maybe," Dulce assented joyfully, "but she loves her husband! Dan, does it ever occur to you that I love you?"

"It has, at odd times."

"Then why don't you ever tell me you love me?"

"Don't I?"

"Not half enough." She was arranging his tie, pushing up his hair, straightening his coat lapels, and fluffing the fresh mono-

grammed handkerchief in his breast pocket, in a sort of luxury of intimacy.

"Does it ever occur to *you* that Manley is patiently waiting all this time to find out which fillies are to go?"

"Oh, let him wait! I hate that man, he's always interrupting. Let's fire him!"

"Fire Manley, you jealous little cat? The best horse man in the state?"

"Well, let's get rid of the horses, too! Marvelous," Dulce coaxed, using one of many names for him, "sit down here in the big chair and let me get into your lap and let's have a little loving. It's such a nasty cold morning, and I don't want to go traipsing around those smelly stables in these slippers."

She was in his lap now, her fragrant face and the golden braids of hair laid against his cheek.

"No, we'll ring when we want the table cleared, Sarah!" Dulce said calmly to the maid who had peeped in the door. "She thinks we're crazy!" Dulce added with a little complacent laugh.

"She darn well knows we're crazy!"

"You think she's pretty," Dulce stated, through firm little pouted lips, her eyes and fingers busy with his hair.

"Who?"

"Sarah."

"Well, Lord, *isn't* she?" Dan asked blankly.

Dulce burst into joyous laughter.

"Of course she is! I don't know that she's the type men admire, and anyway, I think she's engaged to the electric light man," she offered, after a moment's hesitation.

"Are you the biggest fool that ever lived?"

"You know I am!"

"And if old Manley dies of double pneumonia, waiting for me, will you support his family for some years?"

"You know I will! No, but it's really too horrid to go out to-day," Dulce pleaded. "Send him word that I have a cold and have to stay indoors, and later we'll take a ride somewhere!"

"Darling, just because I have to go round the stables with Manley doesn't mean that *you* do."

"Oh-ho?" Dulce said, in arch suspicion, squaring about a little to show him a skeptical eye. "You and Manley are to dawdle around all morning, are you? And I stay up here all alone?"

"All morning! It's after ten o'clock now."

"Well, you wait for me! I'll get into my raincoat and boots."

"I'll go out and get started and you follow me! We'll wait for you at the first sheds."

Pulling on his cap, he was gone. A minute later Dulce spoke in a low tone to the maid.

"Don't throw the newspaper away, Sarah. There's something I want to look up, later on."

Dan had formed a habit of sleeping, in the late afternoon, after their ride or drive. Often Dulce lay down beside him, or dozed in her long deeply pillowed chair by the fire in their bright upstairs sitting room. This afternoon, as he threw himself down at five o'clock, he saw the light of her reading lamp from the next room and called out to her idly,

"What you doing, dear?"

"Nothing. I'm going to lie down in a minute!"

Dan heard the rustle of newspaper as he went off to sleep.

When he awakened an hour later the lights in his own room were lighted, and Dulce, sitting at her dressing table, was looking at him through the mirror.

"Dan," she said breathlessly, opening the conversation instantly, "you did something to-day that has hurt my feelings horribly. I want to ask you not to do it again!"

"What'd I do, petty?" Dan asked, in the agonies of awakening, his head fuzzy and his mouth thick, and the band of his shirt collar wet.

"You lied to me," Dulce said hotly, uncompromisingly.

"When?" he demanded, after a moment of amazed silence.

"When you said that you didn't remember what had interested you in the paper, Dan."

"Oh, for heaven's sake!" he exclaimed with a tolerant laugh. "Is that it? What've you got up your sleeve now?"

"I haven't got anything up my sleeve," Dulce said with cold dignity. "I happened to be glancing at the paper a little while ago, and I saw this."

He was sitting, tousled and bewildered, on the side of his bed, now, and she walked toward him and gave him a newspaper clipping.

It described the opening of the Napa Lincoln Grammar School that morning, and listed the new pupils, in the First Grade; the little beginners on the long road of education. Alphabetically ranged among them was the name of Tommy Wallace.

"That's right!" Dan said, with an elaborate yawn and an innocent upward look. "That's Tommy. He was seven last June."

"Dan!" Dulce was breathing fast. "Don't pretend that you didn't see that this morning!"

"Oh, hell, Dulce," the man protested good-naturedly, "cut it out. Why should I pretend anything?"

"Because I saw your face! I saw you jump."

"Jump nothing. Why should I jump because my kid was started into school?"

"Well, you *did*."

"Well, I say I didn't."

Dan went from bureau to dresser, faintly frowning, as if his one thought was his dressing.

"Dan, will you swear to me that you didn't see that?"

"No, I won't swear!" he said airily. "Of course I saw it, and I lied about it, and I took Cassy to lunch, and I'm in love with Sarah——"

Dulce was watching him with dilated eyes; her color had faded. Now she began to follow him about the room.

"Don't tease me that way, Dan!" she warned him in a whisper. "Don't do it! It's not funny to me. If I thought that you'd really done that I'd kill myself! I tell you I would, Dan. I'm not the kind of woman you can make light of—laugh at. Those

women down there in the town are watching for a chance to say 'I told you so,' to me! They're wondering if you're tired of me because I'm older than you——"

"Look here, my Spanish lady friend," Dan interrupted her, one arm tight about her shaking shoulders, "do you want a good licking?"

She turned brilliant flashing eyes, like a cat's, upon him; her breast heaved less violently.

"No!" she whispered.

"Do you want me to take a strap to you?"

"No!" Dulce said, with a desperate laugh that was half a sob.

"Then don't let me hear any more nonsense out of you! Did you think that when Tommy grew old enough for school Cassy *wouldn't* send him?"

"No, of course not!"

"And do you think that if I *had* happened to see that item in the paper this morning, which I didn't, that I wouldn't have made some comment on it to you, wouldn't have said, 'Oh, Tom starts school to-day?' "

"No-o-o," she admitted, with a reluctant dimple in her fresh, fair cheek.

"Well, then!" said Dan.

But when he went on with his dressing, he was thinking about Tommy. He had been thinking of the child, off and on, all day long, wondering how the first hours in school had impressed the boy. Cassy's heart, he thought, would have been with him all day, too, Cassy and the grandmother and Margaret probably had brought him in this morning, certainly they had come to meet him this afternoon, because when Dan and Dulce had driven into town, to go to the bank and stop at the post office, Dan had looked to see Cassy's blue car parked outside the school and had found it there. It had been empty, Tommy's bodyguard of devoted womenkind had gone straight into the fastness of the First Grade to rescue him.

Dan could imagine Cassy's kiss, her warm, eager, loving, thin

brown face bending above the little tousled, flushed, weary face.

"Was it so bad, my darling? Was the lunch all right?"

It was very sweet and touching, he thought, a mother's concern for her little boy's first day alone in the big world. He remembered that his own mother had packed his lunch for his first day at school; she had put two red plums and two soda crackers in it. Dan never saw buttered soda crackers, stuck together, without remembering his little nervous self, opening a box of luncheon in a strange, cold school yard, and being glad that his lunch was as nice as the other boys' lunches. He was conscious of a little pang of jealousy of Tommy, to be mothered by Cassy throughout his boyhood.

Dulce, who made a sort of religion of comfort and beauty and never spared herself or her household any of their ritual, was always lovely at dinner time. Her golden braids shone like strands of metal, her bared arms and shoulders were firm and white and perfumed; her gowns rustled and twinkled. There were candles in the dining room on chilly nights, and a fire; in the summer the Wallaces dined on a square of level lawn, with shrubs fencing it, and a striped awning overhead. They could look off at far lines of mountains, purple and pink and transparent in sunset light, and sometimes the dogs came and lay silent at their feet, and the white peacocks trailed their spread fans on the wall.

To-night Dulce was in pale blue satin, with crystals and silver sequins winking here and there in the cunningly alternated petals of gauze and velvet and silk; her slippers were blue, there was a jeweled band of blue in her shining hair.

"All this for me?" Dan asked.

"Who else, Marvelous?"

Whether on the terrace, or inside by the fire, her talk was almost all of love; she played a thousand adoring and imaginative variations on the one theme.

"Dan, isn't this heavenly? You and I, alone up here, with our books and our fire and each other?

"Isn't it like a dream, Dan, our meeting—that morning after you came to Napa, when I took the chocolate cake over? Cassy

introduced us, I remember: 'This is Mr. Wallace, Mrs. Varney.'

"If we could have seen the future!

"But Lou liked you, Dan. And Lou always knew that I wasn't in love with him—not passionately. How could I be? No, I was waiting for you and didn't know it!

"And think of the women who never know what it is to give themselves, wholly and completely and proudly, and admit that they love!

"I remember that you had on a gray suit that morning, and Cassy looked so tired—Tommy was the baby then."

"She was just about sure she was going to have another baby," Dan thought. He did not say it aloud. "That was the month we moved from that awful dump in Fulton Street," he thought.

Now he had monogrammed handkerchiefs, and white peacocks walked on the wall of his summer terrace. Life was funny.

Only those few years ago he and Cassy had been buying apples by hoarded twos and threes, they had counted eggs and measured pints of blue city milk. Now, the grapes and figs and apples and eggs, the gallons of country cream couldn't be gathered in—couldn't be used up fast enough.

"I wish to goodness she'd marry her Jessop!" Dulce said.

Dan brought his wandering wits to attention.

"Oh, she doesn't feel that way to Jessop!" he stated quickly. "His firm happened to buy your old place, just as she needed a lawyer. That's the only reason she was so friendly with Jessop. She knew him, and knew his wife, when she was a little girl."

"Oh, is there a wife?"

"There was, I believe."

"Divorced?"

"Oh, no. They're tremendously fine people, the Jessops. No, his wife died."

"Dan, do you realize what you just said?"

"Did I say anything, honey?"

"Don't you *realize* what you said?"

"That Mac Jessop was a widower? But I happen to know it, Dulce. She died in a motor accident down near Los Angeles."

"You said that indeed they weren't divorced, that *they* were very fine people!" Dulce elucidated accusingly.

"Oh? Oh, I get you. Did I?"

"Well, didn't you?"

"Of course the two things had no connection in my mind!"

"Meaning," Dulce continued, undistracted, deadly quiet, "that divorced people are *not* very fine people!"

"My dear child, you can take it that way if you like!"

"But, darling, be reasonable, how else can I take it?"

"It lets me in as deep as you," Dan reminded her meekly.

"Well, exactly!" she agreed, with an amiable laugh. "Poor Puritan Danny, he can't quite think of himself as a divorced and re-married man!"

"I didn't mean anything of the kind about Jessop," Dan reiterated stoutly. "But he is an unusually fine man."

"He looks like a little monster."

"Cassy used to say his mouth was upside down. But when you know him he's a very decent fellow," Dan said.

"When did you know him, Dan?"

"Not until three years ago—not until the divorce. It seems that he was walking over the place, your old place, the Varney place, one day, with an idea of buying it for some dairy interests his firm has, and he saw Cass and the children and went over. She told him how the land lay, and he offered to handle the divorce for her, although as a rule his firm—anyway, they handled hers. It was Jessop who advised her to bring the counter suit. That gave her full claim on the kids, I believe."

"Wiser," Dulce said thoughtfully, after a silence, pouting her lips.

"What is?"

"Her having the children entirely, Dan."

"Oh, sure. It's too hard on kids, splitting them up."

"I should be most horribly jealous of them," Dulce confessed gayly.

"You're not jealous of *her,*" Dan observed with his youthful smile.

"No, because I never took anything away from Cassy that belonged to her," Dulce argued quickly, on familiar ground now, and resting her bared elbows on the table while she looked at him with lambent dark eyes that shone mysteriously in the soft candlelight. "If a woman holds her husband, really," she went on, "she needn't be afraid that any other woman will get him. And if she *doesn't,* why she's lost him anyway!"

"Logical," Dan agreed, sipping his coffee.

"Our marrying simply meant that two of us were in heaven and the third exactly where she was before," Dulce proceeded. 'Feeling as we do, the great sin would have been *not* to marry."

"But still, you'd not—care to—have Tommy up here some day?" Dan asked carelessly.

"I'd simply adore it—if you were away."

"Why only if I were away?"

"Because I couldn't stand it, Dan. You'd take him up to the stables, and he'd adore you; he wouldn't know I was alive." She laughed at him with narrowed eyes and a persuasively tipped head. "I'm made that way!" she pleaded.

"Why not admit that it's perfectly possible to love more than one person at a time?"

"Because it isn't—not the way I love!"

Chapter XVIII

He knew it was true. They had not been married three days before he had appreciated it perfectly. Dulce had long hungered for love, and when she found it she had immersed herself in it completely; it had become her entire existence.

During the months before his divorce had been made final he had spent his time in going about among the Eastern racing stables in the interest of the Napa stock farm, Dulce traveling with a convenient aunt over pretty much the same route. They had met for a few marvelous days here and there; in Richmond, in New York, on the steamer going to Havana. They had been married on the very date of the decree, the aunt had vanished, and the traveling had been resumed on idyllic terms.

And immediately Dulce had become her husband's shadow. Lying exquisite in bed, morning after morning, with her breakfast tray before her, she had lovingly demanded his plans for the day. All right, all wonderful, but he must wait for her; she was going to get up right away.

In the Pullman drawing room, in the taxis, in the hotel foyers and restaurants and bedroom suites, she was always at his side. Her pretty face peeped curiously up from under his arm when he talked business at some stable. At the races she wanted to know Dan's bet before she would bet herself. If he said that he was going down to the betting ring, to the smoking car, to the desk for a moment, to get information, time-tables, tips, Dulce went too.

"That is, if you want me, Marvelous?"

"If I want you!"

She loved strange men and hated strange women, which made him laugh at her. She said calmly that this pretty girl or that, casually encountered on their trips, was "after" him.

Perfumes, postures, beautiful costumes, beautiful lights, were all a part of the business of love; books, gardens, sunsets, meals existed only in so much as they enhanced it. Dulce was radiant with triumph when she finally drew Dan home from the pro-

longed honeymoon journeyings and brought him to La Lomita, which had been painted, altered, and improved all summer long in anticipation of this moment.

"This is our world, my dearest dearest, complete, and now nobody can take you away from me even for a moment! What do we care what the town thinks about us? We're safe up here; we don't have to travel around any more; we're home!

"Some day," she used to say to him, "some day when we're older, we've had all this wonderfulness just to our two selves, then we'll have just one beautiful little girl, shall we? But not yet! We must have our heaven all alone, first.

"Men don't really care for children; they want their women, always fresh and sweet and ready to be loved, isn't that so, Dan? If I got ugly and pale and there was a baby crying somewhere——"

"You're baby enough, you jealous little Mex!"

"Well, then, kiss me!"

Everything ended with the command. Politics, philosophy, science, all led there.

"I'll tell you what I think is the issue of the campaign, Mr. Wallace. It is, do you love me? They can do whatever they like with a cancer serum, what I want to know is, do you realize how long it is since you have kissed anybody in this room?"

For awhile Dan devoted himself to the stables, Dulce puttering contentedly at his side. He rode heavily and badly, and Dulce and the other men on the place rode like vaqueros, and that tempered his enthusiasm for the saddle. And shortly he discovered that Manley, the old overseer, was one manager in a thousand, that no one in the state was better qualified than Manley to make the most of the ranch and the stock.

Manley came to him respectfully for authorizations, and Dan tried to be original and intelligent in suggestions, but he had not been six months on the place before he knew that his job was purely ornamental. He was the Señora's husband, who walked with her among the model corrals and stables, and approved of everything and knew nothing. And if he wished to ride he must

be given a safe, jogging mount and must be told that his was one of the best, the most spirited in the stable.

Meanwhile the town, which had welcomed him and his delicate, shabby wife so warmly to the old Pringle place five years earlier, was acting a little oddly in the matter of his second marriage. Men greeted him amiably enough in the streets, and when he and Dulce went down to see a movie they were always surrounded by agreeable old friends, as they dawdled up the aisle, coming out. But the women did not call on Dulce, and although she went to the club several times that first winter, Dan knew that she sensed a coolness there, even if it were unexpressed. Not that the club meant much to Dulce, or ever had. Still, it made them feel a little alienated.

And then there was ridiculous old Chess Romain, who did not amount to a row of beans anyway, but who had had the effrontery to overlook Dan's hand and to mention something regarding a polecat when they met. Chess, to whom Dan had given a job at the Wallace and Varney Garage, when Chess had been down and out, years ago! It was too silly! An old drunk like that holding himself up as a dictator of morality!

Dan began to experiment with espaliered fruit trees, and wrote an article for an agricultural journal for which he was paid fifteen dollars.

Dulce was jealous even of the fruit trees.

"My darling, in a crowded place like France or England I can understand it, yes. But up here at La Lomita, where we have thousands of uncultivated acres, and all the apricots and peaches we want, it seems a little ridiculous!"

"I get a kick out of it, just the same."

"You get such a kick out of it that you are practically spending your whole day out here and thinking about nothing else! I nearly cried about it this morning."

"Oh, look here, you mustn't cry!"

"Well, I tell you, I nearly did."

"With which eye, honey? This one?"

"And the other, too."

"Well, there, does that help?"

"One more big one, on each eye, might."

And they were back at the kissing again.

She asked him questions about all the married pairs they knew.

"Do you think they're happy, Dan?"

"They seem happy enough to me. They seem crazy about their new house and their baby."

"Yes, but I don't mean that. I mean do you think they're *lovers,* the way we are? Miserable if they aren't together?"

"We-ell, no, I'd say not. Most people aren't, after awhile, are they?"

"Most people never have the slightest glimpse of what we have, Dan."

"No, I suppose not."

"They put up with the imitation because they don't know any better."

"I s'pose so."

"Elizabeth Barrett Browning was much older than Browning, Dan, and they were real lovers, too. When she wrote the Sonnets . . ."

And over and over again, out of the fullness of her happiness:

"Dan, is there anything you want that you haven't got? Is there anything—anything—*anything* you want changed? The only thing I live for is to have you absolutely happy!"

She did not want to travel any more; she said that her nose got full of cinders, and her skin of grease, and she looked awful. The rooms on boats and cars were such crowded little rooms, and she could not sit in Dan's lap. Besides, girls were always trying to get him away from her.

And, saying all this, she would laugh exculpatingly.

"I don't believe all the women in the world are trying to get all the men from all the wives," Dan summarized it mildly.

"No, neither do I. But since I'm uncomfortable traveling, Dan, and since we're utterly, perfectly, absolutely happy here, why should we move?"

He learned, with many a wiser man before him, that jealousy

is as definite a disorder as measles, and incurable. Dulce's jealousy was before him everywhere; he could not finish a sentence without sensing that she had put her own lightning construction upon what he had said.

When her mind was at ease she was a beautiful, vivacious, generous woman, full of affectations that were charming even though obvious, and quite unspoiled, in the usual sense, by money. But her mind was not often at ease. Her world was honeycombed with possible slights, deceptions, coolnesses on Dan's part, and each and every one of them had to be proved a myth. When all this was done, he came confusedly to think, there was not much of Dulce left. Twenty, thirty, forty little flare-ups a day were not too many for Dulce; she loved the actual quarreling only a little less than she reveled in the inevitable reconciliation. These were all thrilling constructions of the verb "to love."

He learned another thing, too, as the first anniversary of their marriage came about. Dan began to perceive the brutal deceptiveness with which Nature, for her own purposes, casts a glamour over this or that poor mortal of common clay, blinding, dazing, intoxicating, deafening the lover with her own favorite little form of masquerade, until his senses swim together in utter confusion.

He remembered the time when the satin, forbidden touch of Dulce's red mouth was delirium; he remembered brooding, terrible winter days at the ranch, when the moral and conventional bars that kept him away from old Varney's beautiful young widow, across the road, were like irons burning deep into his flesh. He remembered telephoning Dulce, just to hear the few formal words she might say over the telephone, and hating the instrument as he put it down, because now he might not decently reach her in this way again for at least an interval of minutes.

Dulce's old smile, the thrilling sight of her, cased in furs and descending from her car at the service station, and the level, expressionless, breath-taking look she used to give him sometimes when Cassy was by, all came back to him with a mood of simple bewilderment. This—this handsome blonde woman, always so

daintily gowned and perfumed, was that same Dulce, these were the same lips, the same voice, the same smile. She was his now, and she loved him far more than she had loved him in the old days. And he loved her, too—great Scott, why shouldn't he? She lived only to please him.

Only—only it all seemed to different. It was hard to go back and reconstruct the motives under which they had all acted.

"Three important questions, Marvelous. What did you wind your big 'larm clock for, and what are you finking 'bout, and do you love me?"

She would break into his musings gayly. Dan told himself that she was happy, at any rate. He had to add the damning phrase to almost all his thoughts on the subject.

Fiercely, he recounted his advantages, and they summed up complete happiness—and he was completely miserable. Restlessness burned in his veins; he could seem to settle down to nothing. Feverish thoughts of getting to work beset him; it was no life for a man, this idle existence among the white fences and red-roofed stables of La Lomita, with a devoted wife and a troupe of servants always at hand to spoil him.

"Dan, think of the men who go hungering all their lives for some good woman to love them, passionately, completely!"

"Gosh, yes."

"And think of everything else we have, Dan, no money troubles, and our health—why, there's hardly a person alive who isn't starving either for money, or health, or love!"

"That's right."

She asked the Williamses, the Robertses and the Cutters to dinner, and they all came, and the event was a great success; Dulce looked her best, was gayly gracious and triumphant, and so fondly demonstrative with Dan that he could not but feel just a trifle—well, not embarrassed exactly, but certainly self-conscious. Dulce's joy in her love was irrepressible; she wanted to lay her face against Dan's head, when she passed by the back of his chair, and asked her guests if he "wasn't the most beautiful thing God ever made," and she was disconcertingly frank with grave,

quiet Minnie Roberts and giggling Helen Williams as to his personal habits; "Do you think he'd ever hang up his pajamas, or think to open the bedroom windows?"

"My, you've got it awful bad, Mrs. Wallace!" Helen Williams said, with her inevitable little laugh more nervous than usual. Mrs. Cutter, the spirited wife of Dulce's business manager, was the only one of the three to say anything to which Dulce could take exception, and she said it to Dan, who took very good care that neither Dulce nor Mabel Cutter's husband should know of it.

"I'm very, very fond of Cassy," Mrs. Cutter said firmly and quietly to Dan. "She's on my relief committee at the club for the factory fire sufferers. She's been a tower of strength."

The last three words made Dan see her, in a flash, the brown, eager, resourceful girl whose slender figure he had seen so often in dingy kitchens, answering the demands of stove, sink, faucets, table, and babies all at once. He winced visibly at Mrs. Cutter's remark, and hated her, even while he smiled gallantly and said:

"That's the sort of work she'd love!"

Mrs. Cutter pursued the subject no farther. But suddenly Dan saw the truth, that this good wife had accompanied her husband to the dinner party reluctantly, that only loyalty to his business interests had brought her to Dulce's house.

He wondered, grimly, how many other virtuous, smug women in the town were likewise judging him. They could all go to hell, Dan thought, turning to serve himself to the tomato aspic and the green asparagus tips. It was a funny thing if a man were not free to do something sanctioned by law and accepted by all reasonable, up-to-date communities.

He and Dulce could quit this neighborhood easily enough and establish themselves in some bigger place, where their private concerns would not be the business of every little narrow-minded gossiping woman who wanted something to babble about.

"Mayonnaise?" he said sourly to the waitress.

"Marvelous," Dulce said instantly from her end of the table, "who do you think's running this dinner? She's going to pass it

just as soon as the salad is served.—I'm telling tales on us!" she told him.

"I'll bet you are!"

"No, I'm only telling Dr. Williams about what happened the day after we were married! In the first place, we had the most beautiful suite at the Bonair that I ever saw in my life—wasn't it perfectly beautiful, Dan?"

"It looked all right to me," Dan admitted significantly, with a dry laugh. Everyone laughed.

"No, but it really was one of the most stunning suites I've ever seen in my life," Dulce persisted, laughing protestingly and delightedly herself. "It was all modernist—stunning. Well, anyway, we ordered breakfast . . ."

All her talk to-night was of themselves and their happiness. They knew it was selfish, Dulce confessed, but they just didn't need outsiders; they were their own world. Everything had smiled upon them, and the reason for all this felicity was invariably Dulce.

A friend of her father's had been at the Belmont track—wasn't that curious?—and of course had treated her like a queen. Another old friend had taken them up into Westchester, to a club that simply never admitted visitors—wasn't that lucky? Dan had helped her buy hats in New York, and then she had taken him to the most fashionable tailor there and had made him buy himself an overcoat.

Dan suddenly wanted to tell them all that he was going into business, any business. The coal business, building, painting, or back into the garage—anything that was hard, real, uncompromising work, and that would take him away from the too-sweet atmosphere of La Lomita for long hours every day. These guests of theirs to-night, these dumb, limited, country-town people, evidently thought of him as a commoner, the boy of the garage, to whom his rich employer had taken an older woman's sudden passionate fancy. They were saying to themselves, "Pretty soft for Dan Wallace! She's not going to let him get ten feet away from her apron strings until she's had enough of it!"

The wretched mood of job-hunting possessed him; he fancied himself down in San Francisco, walking into offices and asking lightly and indifferently for employment.

"Been up in the Napa valley for some years, but now I'm back here and about ready to locate myself. . . ."

Bonds. Insurance. Real estate. Or, "I'm with the General Electric; I'm with the Standard Oil; I'm down at the National Bank. . . ."

Dulce highly disapproved of all this. She complained that she did not know a soul in San Francisco, except her cousins, and these she hated.

"I can't see us in a California or a Washington Street apartment, Dan; I'd be bored to death! You'd be away all day, and I'd have nothing in the world to do. I'll tell you what, I'll get rid of Manley, and you run the ranch for a year. That'll keep you busy, and I can be with you all the time!"

"Fire Manley!"

"Oh, no, I wouldn't fire him, darling. I'd just give him a year's holiday on full pay. He has a married daughter down in Fresno, and he has been wanting to visit other stock farms for a long while."

Dan thought of the trim stables, sheds, and paddocks, the track and the pastures of La Lomita. He thought of the "horse boys," lean, silent men who knew horses as mothers know small babies, who went about with halters and buckets quietly, now and then exchanging about their charges monosyllables that meant more than all his earnest, book-acquired theories.

He could walk about the stables, it was true, and look knowing and nod his head thoughtfully. And Buck and Tod and Lemons and the Kid would go their own way and use their own judgment just the same. They never took him into their councils or their confidences.

Well, he had no money worries, no health worries, and his wife was in love with him. He was among the happiest and most fortunate of men. If there were a few pin pricks here and there, they were not worth considering; they only showed how soft he had

grown. Dulce was perfectly happy, and it was entirely his own fault if he was not perfectly happy, too.

And then, quite suddenly, early in the third year of their marriage, it was over. He had been in love with Dulce, and he simply —wasn't. The glow, the glamour, whatever it was that had changed, in his eyes, this squarely built, vivid, golden-braided woman in the late thirties into a goddess, disappeared as swiftly as it had come. It was over.

Dulce was once more just a human being, devoted, handsome, generous according to her lights, selfish, spoiled, and as jealous as a tigress. He was caged with her, here in a perfectly unreal, luxurious environment on the top of a hill, and his every hour, his every thought, his every mood belonged to her.

"Well, that's all right, too," Dan told himself philosophically. "Lots of men aren't so crazy about their wives. But breakfast and dinner and reading books and all the rest of it go right on, just the same."

But he was still simple and unsophisticated enough to be amazed at the suddenness of it all. He noted other cases just as surprising, even more spectacular, in the papers. Men and women divorcing after one year—after six months of marriage. Hating each other just a few months after they had pledged themselves to lifelong love.

He and Dulce were not as bad as that. He still liked her enormously, and she loved him; they were a long way from any confession of a change in feeling.

Besides, there was loyalty, a man's loyalty to the woman who loved him, the woman he had asked to be his wife.

Loyalty. It was a funny thing.

"Nobody ever taught me anything about loyalty when I was a kid," Dan mused, walking through the warm autumn woods upon a pathway of crisp, prickly little yellowed oak leaves. "I guess I'll never learn anything, I'll live and die a roughneck!"

Chipmunks regarded him from low tree branches, their bright amber eyes fearful and restless. Blue jays looped the woods with flashes of color; Dan saw rabbits and heard the swift sweet drums

of the sentinel quail deep in the forest. The hot still air was scented with a hundred balms; when he came to an opening in the woods he saw the great rings of the encircling mountains, only a shade deeper than the pale blue sky.

He sat on a fallen log and looked down into the prosperous valley as into a great bowl. The side hills were streaked with descending irregular belts of woodland and checkered neatly with vines and orchards. Across the meadows ran lines of eucalyptus, the dingy, magnificent old avenues that had led to long ago magnificent homesteads; the roofs of the town were bowered in trees. He could identify the Pringle farm, up on the westward rise, with the highway passing a mile or two away; he could see a speck of red glint where the garage stood and identify a tiny moving beetle on the road as a car, now and then, moving toward it or away from it in the still heat.

"Well, maybe I'm cutting my wisdom teeth. But, my God, how it hurts!"

"Loyal? Sure I'll be loyal to Dulce. That's my job, now. Two or three years ago it was up to me to be loyal to Cass, and I couldn't make the grade. Nobody ever told me that you get up against things in this life, and you simply have to stand for them. That's loyalty.

"My gosh, I'd like a chance to have to be loyal to you again, Cass."

Chapter XIX

It was from this particular autumn walk, through dry, rustling oak woods scented with sage, tarweed, and a hundred other aromatic grasses, that Dan Wallace dated the awakening of his own soul.

Quite simply, as he sat on a fallen log looking down into the valley, the whole thing cleared in his mind, and his confusion, his dubious and troubled thoughts, burned free into deepening shame and remorse.

For a few moments he felt that he could not bear it, and he put his head down into his hands, his whole body writhing.

Not that he saw it all, saw the whole question of Dulce, Cassy, himself, his children, clearly, in that first flash of agony. But he felt a sickening apprehension of what was to come when he should indeed see it clearly. And his reason, overwhelmed by his heart, rushed madly to and fro, seeking for extenuating circumstances, for excuses that might quiet the wild tumult in his soul.

"My God," he said aloud, in the balm-scented heat and sweetness of the oak woods, "what have I done!"

He saw in a flash, supernaturally clear and bright, the home kitchen, the saucepans and high chairs, the wood box, the nail behind the door where the blue apron hung. Morning sunshine streaming in over a frosty back yard, and steam rising from the coffee pot, and a bundle of soft, alert, struggling babyhood under a man's arm.

"Roll her blanket tight around her feet, Dan. And sit down, darling, there's popovers, and they can't wait."

Oh, Cassy, Cassy! Lean and brown and eager and happy! What was the mystery, the beauty of that old shabby kingdom of frosted windows and coffee pot and sleepy babyhood that had somehow escaped him so completely?

Back from his walk, he went up through the orderly, airy house to Dulce's room, to find her, as he expected to find her, stretched upon her couch under the frailest of coverings and in the frailest of diaphanous robes. On either side of the airy upper room great

windows were opened; the afternoon was growing cooler. Dulce had a glass bowl of grapes and figs on her table.

She stretched forth a satiny hand.

"Have a nice walk?"

"Wonderful."

"Wasn't it pretty hot?"

"Yes, but I liked it."

"Miss me?"

"Kept wishing you had come along. It was lovely up in the woods."

"Want some fruit, Danny?"

"No, I'm going to sit here a minute and get my breath, and then I'll have a bath. That clock right?"

"Yes. Why, Absurdity?"

"I thought it was later. Quarter to four, eh?"

He fell to musing, her hand still in his.

"Quarter to four, and you were to be back in the house at twenty minutes past three, you renegade. However, I forgive you. Danny——"

"What is it, dear?"

"Don't call me 'dear': it sounds so married!"

"I thought it was 'my dear' that sounded married."

"Both of them are awful. But, Danny, do you know what I've been doing since you went out?"

"Manicuring."

"Aren't you awful! No, I've been adoring you."

"Well, that was no more than your duty."

"And do you know why?"

"Special reason, eh?'

"Special reason. You know, when you'd gone, and I was missing you, and feeling just a little blue," Dulce said, smiling through moistening lashes, "I got up and went to my desk, over there, where I have your letters stored away. And, Danny, if I adored you before, you haven't any idea how they made me love you! I was reading the ones when we'd decided that we had to part, 'member? You'd write me nights, that winter, down in the

kitchen, because it was warm, after Cassy had gone to bed. And it's so touching, Dan, it's *heartrending,* where you say that you are trying to fill up your heart with other things, and talking about Tommy, and little Margaret—she was just learning to talk."

His expression did not change because of the knife thrust into his heart. He went on thumbing her smooth hand gently and looking at her with his kindly, usual smile.

"And then I came to the letter you sent her, Dan, do you remember? I kept a copy of it. And I think it's the most beautiful letter I ever read in my life! Danny, how you must love me, to say all that about me!"

"No, I'm a pretty poor specimen," he said gravely.

"Listen to him!" Dulce sat up and bent forward to kiss him. "Oh, Dan, always love me the way you did when you wrote that letter!" she said. "I want you to read it again. It's—well, it's perfect. You say that you could give me up and with me the most wonderful dream of happiness that ever had come into your life if you truly believed in your heart of hearts that the happiness of any one of us would be helped by it. You say—and, oh, Dan, this was so true!—that you and I don't want our great love for each other to bring anything but more joy into the world—do you remember?"

"Kinder."

"And you say, 'for good or evil, the most wise and simple, sad and sweet woman in the world has entered into my very being, and the greatest sin I could commit against all three of us would be to refuse my destiny where she is concerned.' "

"You got it by heart?"

"Don't be ashamed of it, Dan; don't laugh at me! It's too beautiful. I don't see how *anyone* could fail to be affected by it—no, I can't say that. I don't blame Cassy for not being affected, because of course she felt bitter, she felt jealous, and you can't blame her," Dulce went on. She hesitated. A somewhat doubtful expression came into her mobile, glowing face. "Her letter's there, too, Dan," she said.

A scene from the Metro-*Goldwyn*-Mayer All-Talking Picture "Passion Flower," a William de Mille Production.

Dan's face turned a dark red.

"Cassy's?"

"Cassy's. Don't you remember she wrote you, just at the end?"

"Yep. I remember."

"Remember that you didn't get the letter until we'd been married a week? It followed us, remember?"

He nodded, a look of reluctance, of pain in his eyes.

"That was an awful letter to write, Dan," Dulce observed moderately. She looked at him curiously, challengingly.

Dan cleared his throat, essaying to speak lightly.

"What was awful about it?"

Dulce arched her innocent, surprised eyebrows.

"Well, don't *you* think so?"

"I don't—" he knew he was getting in deeper and deeper into one of those conversational morasses in which Dulce delighted; he couldn't help it—"I don't remember anything *awful* about it."

"Well, my dear, we were married!" Dulce reminded him virtuously.

Dan laughed out suddenly and loudly, not quite kindly. He made no comment.

"Of course, she didn't know that," Dulce pursued, a little nettled and hurt. "But—well, it was a letter I couldn't have written to any man."

"I don't remember anything so queer about it," Dan persisted doggedly.

"Well, for one thing," Dulce began rapidly, "for one thing, she wrote to you as if there had never been any quarrels or any separation—with which she had at *least* as much to do as you—she just takes it calmly for granted that you want to come back and that it doesn't make any difference how ridiculous that would look to everyone, or what poor Dulce would feel." She paused, looking expectantly at him.

"Honestly, Dan, I don't think any woman has a right to write a man a letter like that when everything was settled."

Dan was silent. Dulce's mouth tightened a little.

"Are you sure you remember that letter?" she asked.

"Yep. We were in New York, when a lot of home mail came, and that with it."

"We read it together!" Dulce said in fond reminiscence.

He remembered her, blonde and scented and jeweled, trailing laces and frothy silks about their bedroom in a glitter of sunshine and massed flowers. He remembered that he had indeed shown her Cassy's home letter, with its news of cats and dogs, farm and babies, and of Cassy's lonely self, in the new dimity gown, writing on a warm summer evening in the old sitting room.

"Oh, well, I don't know—I can kinder understand it," he offered rather uncertainly.

"I can understand it, knowing Cassy," Dulce said cryptically.

"But it couldn't have *changed* anything!" she burst out suddenly; "it wouldn't have changed anything even if it had come before we were married. We loved each other—we couldn't help that. It wasn't anybody's fault; it was just Cassy's misfortune! Did she think you were calmly going to go back where things were before? Why, we did our best to consider Cassy, Dan, don't you remember? We discussed everything."

His attention was wandering. Presently he said:

"I wonder what you'd do if a man left you, Dulciana?"

"You mean if Lou had fallen in love with some other woman?"

"Well, if anyone had."

"Frank Place didn't have spirit enough to get out when I used to beg him to leave me alone, and go away, and never under any circumstances to come back!" Dulce remembered. "As for Lou, he always adored me; he was much, much older than I was, and he always acted . . ."

When he brought his wandering attention to her steady, soft-voiced flow of words again, she was saying:

"But, I don't know, I believe I could always hold a man, Dan, if I loved him! Men have always been crazier about me than I've been about them. Until I met you, I mean. And if you ever got tired of me, I'd simply walk in there to my bedroom and take my nice little pistol out of the top drawer and kill myself!'

"You would not!"

"I tell you I would."

"Even if—" his tone was impersonal, bantering, he talked as if pursuing the idlest of conversations—"even if I found someone else to love, as I said—as I did when I fell in love with you?"

"But how could you fall in love with someone else, Ridiculous, when you're in love with me?"

"Oh, just as I did three years ago."

"But you weren't in love with Cassy, Dan. We said over and over again that we weren't doing wrong, because there was nothing to take away from her. Surely you remember that?"

"Oh, sure."

"The time I dread," Dulce mused aloud luxuriously, "is about ten years from now. I'll be forty-eight, Dan—almost fifty, isn't that horrible?—And you'll be only forty—a man is young at forty. Oh, how I'll watch my handsome boy then!"

"Ten years," Dan echoed in his soul, as he kissed the soft, beautifully groomed hand he held, and relinquished it and went in to dress.

That night, when Dulce was asleep, he came noiselessly out to the sitting room and went to the desk. He opened it and fumbled there for a few minutes by the light of the drowsing wood fire behind the shining brass andirons.

From the desk he went to the hearth, and the dying flames mounted suddenly and briskly upon the sheets of letter paper that fluttered down upon them. Dan stood motionless, watching them, until the last gray ash had settled down upon the glowing logs.

And three days later, while Dulce was at a beauty parlor, he drove out toward the main highway, and passed the Wallace and Varney Garage, which was gallant in trimmed lawn and green paint, at the forks, and went on, up the rise between the meadows, to the place where the Varney farm and the old Pringle place faced each other.

Dan drove two or three hundred feet beyond the gates, and parked his car, and sat looking down across the gracious, descend-

ing slopes of the meadows, outlined with long files of tall poplar and eucalyptus trees, and peppered with great oaks that threw blots of rich dark shade on the yellowed stubble.

There were many changes visible on the Varney farm. They were evidently establishing a cattle farm there; long sheds and barns were going up, at the back of the house; and Dan had noticed on the highway, as he passed, one or two neat small signs embellished with the mild-eyed picture of a Jersey's head: "One of the Sunny Nursery Milk Units."

But the Pringle place looked just the same. No, not quite the same, there had been improvements there, too, but they were of a less striking order. The Varney place had been changed into a dairy ranch, but its neighbor had merely gone on as a prosperous homestead. Dan knew that Mrs. Pringle was making Gertrude a handsome allowance, in Europe, and that she duplicated it for Cassy, who also owned the ranch now, and who was evidently putting some of her income back into the place.

All the sheds and barns and fences were whitewashed; and tree shadows fell across them in mellow blots and golden lacework in the soft autumn afternoon. The peppers and willows were turning yellow, yellow leaves drifted down from the pear trees, in motionless clear air that was softening toward sunset. Order and quiet reigned, and yet there was a sense of spareness, of thrift, over the whole scene too. Dan vaguely felt that the indescribable homeliness and simplicity of it all enhanced the charm of it as no expensive equipment, no electric devices and uniformed operators, no big boastful signs or modern impressiveness in size, could do. This was merely a ranch house, with a shabby tin bucket by a barn doorway, near the paddock where two restless calves nosed the bars and flirted anxious little tails, with a cat asleep on the granary window, and a few hens—not many, and not of one breed alone, fluffing comfortably in the dust of a barnyard lane in the care of an assertive cock.

There was a big wood pile in a little yard all by itself, and a smaller one not far from the kitchen door; children's small gar-

ments stirred idly on a clothes line, and two or three farm horses looked over a rail fence interestedly. Sunflowers grew in a long row beside a whitewashed wall; there were other flowers, in under the oak trees, marigolds, and stock and hollyhocks, and dahlias heavy on their frail stems. And among the white trunks of the orchard trees Dan could see boxes of apples and pears—the air was sweet with them, the good autumn smell of them. He could see rich, chocolate-brown stalks of yarrow against the yellow orchard grass, and masses of pale blue Michaelmas daisies were blown like blue drifts against the rocky wall that shut off the road.

While he watched, the kitchen door banged, and two children came down the steps. Dan knew their ages: the boy was nearly seven, the girl not much more than a year younger. His boy and girl. They stood hand in hand looking at a long table that stood in the shade against the house; Dan was near enough to see that there were lines of glasses—jelly glasses and larger jars—ranged on the table. Cassy was putting up apple jelly and quince preserves.

A young woman came out of the house, and Dan's heart rose on a bound. But it was an unknown girl, a blonde, who spoke to the children and put some more jars on the table. Tommy and Margaret wandered on to the fence, and began to work busily over a stream that fell from the too full windmill, where some baby ducks were paddling. Dan saw Margaret embrace a duck, in her old impetuous manner, and saw Tommy firmly, but evidently without unpleasantness, rescue it.

After awhile he drove on, up about the upper farm, where the old huddle of Japanese tenant cottages had been. It was all cleaned up now, painted white and green, and the tumble-down little places looked quite civilized with fences and gardens.

He stopped his car, and a clean old woman came out of the house, threw her blue apron over her arm, and walked to the fence, gathering dead hollyhocks from their stalks as she talked to him.

"Japs all gone?"

"Oh, yes, dey gone dese two yahr now," the woman said.

"You farming the place?"

"My man farmer, en my boys dey halp. My girl work house for boss. Vay ban hare two yahr, vay come Svayden."

"I see."

He touched his hat and drove away. It was nearly five years since a young man, worried by poverty and responsibility, had taken possession of these fruitful, prosperous acres, had carried china and furniture into that ugly, comfortable, shadow-mottled old farmhouse, and had built a rubbish fire out in the yard, under the peppers and willows, where this morning washing was hanging, and where jelly was hardening in the shade.

Behind that young man had been the memory of a runaway marriage, and an attic home in which there were two blue bowls and half a cabbage, and a wide, forlorn iron bed with dingy brass balls on its head and base. There had been a flat below in which babies had been wailing high above the discordant quarrels between radios and Victrolas, and a young wife feeling sick and wretched and leaning her dark, gallant head in sheer misery against the distempered walls!

Cassy had been beside the man who had made the bonfire, her slender body twisted in the grip of new responsibilities, her brown face pale, her blue eyes alight with joy and hope.

"Isn't this fun, Danny, isn't this fun, isn't this fun?" Unpacking, hard work, first struggles with the unfamiliar stove and sink, Tommy's meals and garments and cribs all on her hands, but she had been happy. The Fulton Street flat, the loneliness, the doubt had been all behind her, and here were space, air and sunshine, apples, eggs and milk for her children, and Danny to have his chance! It was all "fun."

And across the road, although neither one had known it, had been a lonely, idle, baffled woman, hungry for love, watching the lights of the old Pringle house, as she had confessed to him long afterward, with an agony of jealousy in her heart.

"Well, I'm watching them now!" Dan said aloud. A chipmunk on the hedge looked at him amazedly and with a flash of gold and brown was gone. The shadows of the western trees and fences were lying in a clean pattern now, across the road.

That night he wrote Cassy a letter.

Chapter XX

"Well, what'd you think of the book, Cassy?"

"What book, Mac?"

"The book I left for you yesterday?"

"Oh, yes—oh, I didn't read it."

"I didn't expect you to read it; it's three hundred pages!"

Cassy started guiltily and came suddenly to attention.

"Mac, I'm so dumb! I wasn't listening."

"What's up?" he asked, with a sudden keen, suspicious look.

Cassy glanced about the old grape arbor cautiously. Tommy had chosen the hottest hour of the hot October afternoon to climb on top of the old white-painted lattice; his starfish form could be seen struggling among the agitated leaves. Leaves fluttered occasionally to the ground, with a little rain of grapes, black and clear amber. Margaret, with her head on her Raggedy Ann doll, was asleep in the hammock on the lawn a few feet away.

"I had a letter," Cassy confessed in a low voice.

"From Dan?" Macallister Jessop asked with quick apprehension. Cassy, cool and fresh in her cross-barred organdy, with her dark hair still damp from a recent brushing, and the vine patterns dappling her slender white figure, nodded and looked down again at her mending.

"What's he want?"

"Mac, what a way to put it! He doesn't want anything."

Jessop pursed his lips, narrowed his eyes, indulged in a faint shrug.

"It upset me horribly," Cassy admitted, her throat thickening. "I couldn't sleep all night. It broke me all up."

"What'd it say?"

"Nothing, really. He said—well, anyway, I knew he meant that he had had it on his mind for some time to write me and say that he was awfully sorry that I'd felt so badly when the—when he left me, and that a man under the circumstances wasn't normal—wasn't able to judge how much pain he was giving, and—well, and that he was sorry——"

"Cassy, for God's sake!"

"I can't help it!" she said, drying her sudden rush of tears and recovering her self-control with an effort.

"Is that all he said?"

"That's all."

The man regarded her keenly for a few seconds before he said sympathetically and timidly:

"And did that make you feel so badly, Cassy?"

For a minute she merely regarded him levelly, her eyelashes sopping, her head held high. Then her lips trembled, and with a helpless, appealing look that he found infinitely touching she dropped her head and pressed her brown, thin young hand tightly upon her eyes.

"Damn!" he said.

"I can't help it," Cassy said with a broken shadow of a laugh for his vehemence.

"You can't—now, my dear girl," he began persuasively, "you can't imagine yourself as still caring about that fellow?"

"I do."

"Well, it's not like you, Cassy. You're too sensible a woman. It's ridiculous."

"Oh, I know that, Mac."

"H'm!" the man grumbled, and there was a long silence.

It was pleasant in the summerhouse, which stood on the highest point of ground on the ranch, with a great oak spread above it, and a descending view of the meadows and the roofs of the town through its opened door. Nor a bird stirred in the garden in the afternoon heat, but a few great lazy bees hung over the late flowers, and in the path a lizard whisked into view, lay watchful and palpitant for a few seconds, and whisked out of sight again. The air was sweet and hot, scented with flowers. Cassy sat in a basket chair, slim, cool, at ease. The man, dressed in white riding breeches, with his glasses as always poised over the bright, intelligent eyes that lighted his dark face, was seated on the round iron bench that circled the little room, where he could watch her earnest, quiet face. The ugly mouth that Cassy had once said was

upside down was a kindly mouth, as well, and there was infinite understanding and sympathy in its smile.

Tommy proceeded upon his devastating way, and leaves and grapes continued to fall. Otherwise a dreaming afternoon stillness held the ranch and the world.

"Indian summer, Cassy."

"And isn't it delicious!" She spoke with recovered calm, and after a moment added, returning to the subject of her own volition, "I don't idealize Dan, Mac. I know he treated me badly, treated me like a——"

"Skunk," Mac supplied obligingly.

"If you like," Cassy said, shrugging and conceding the word. "But I know Dan," she went on in a thoughtful voice. "I know Dan and I know just what he did. And to understand is to forgive, Mac."

"Some men play in luck and some don't," the man commented dryly.

"There's no luck about it. It doesn't alter the state of affairs at all to have me forgive him."

"It would alter it to the extent of making him feel damn comfortable, if he knew it."

"But I wrote him that I would rather not see him."

"Oh, he wanted to see you?"

The red came up in Cassy's clear brown cheeks.

"Well, yes, in a way he did," she admitted defensively.

Immediately she was silent, roused herself again.

"No, I won't see him," she said. "What would be gained by it?

"You have to take the world as it is, Mac," she argued, out of a silence. "I couldn't have done what Dan did, but I can understand his doing it."

"Well, I can't," Mac persisted briefly, displeased.

"My dear Mac," she said lightly yet deliberately, "you forget that I ran away with a chauffeur."

"Oh, well, in many ways—Wallace wasn't——" he was beginning uncomfortably when she interrupted him.

"He was a chauffeur, Mac."

"Yes, I know. But you hear of gentlemen's sons going in for waiting on table and what not."

"Of course you do. Only—he didn't happen to be a gentleman's son. He had no code behind him, Mac. When we were first married he used to amaze me, with his surprise that there were rules —I mean that there were things that could and things that couldn't be done."

"Lots of men in our best society walk out on their wives, Cassy."

"I know they do—I know they do!" she said eagerly. "But they know. *They're* the skunks, if you like. Dan didn't know. That's just the difference. He couldn't have done it if he had known. Why, Mac, Dan's one of the sweetest, one of the most generous men I've ever known in my life. He wants to be fine. That's what's breaking my heart now, because I know he must be coming to see what he did as it really was!

"I had told him things, and he had believed me. And then she came along and told him a lot more, about the sacredness of true love, and that I wouldn't be happy—I wouldn't want him, if I once knew of their love, and he believed her. Of course he did! She told him how many really smart people are divorced, and that I'd have lots of money, and he'd have lots of money, and it was the best thing all round.

"And once she'd gotten him mesmerized, Mac——"

"Cassy," the man said after a long silence, "you're beginning to think of him again?"

"I don't believe I've ever stopped."

"My God, what a mess!" Mac said.

"Isn't it? But you can't unlove people to order," Cassy argued, "any more than you can love them to order. Mothers love their sons in jail, Mac; I know I'd love Tommy in jail, and Dan is just like a big boy; I can't throw him down just because he's thrown me down. He's still my old partner, who took me away from home, where I was so hungry, and so unhappy, and bought me blue bowls and bungalow aprons, and made me laugh.

"Why, that first winter, Mac, when we had a terrible old apartment out on Shotwell Street—we paid fourteen dollars' rent for it—we used to laugh so that the other people in the house complained. And it's so wonderful to laugh—it was so wonderful to meet him on Saturdays at noon, and go shopping, and have supper, and then go into a movie with ten cents' worth of peanut brittle, and laugh and laugh and laugh because we were so happy!

"I've never," she went on, smiling and blinking, "I've never had any companion like him; I've never had any companion at all! He's always been what Margaret called me the other day. She rubbed her head against my arm, and said, 'Mom, you're my best p'rsson!' Dan's been my best person always.

"I used to feel differently when he was in the house, puttering about. Nothing seems to happen now that I can't talk things over with Dan."

"My marriage was never like that," Mac said.

"Mac, just his getting home at night always has given me a—a *finished* feeling—I don't know what to call it! My heart would settle down like something climbing into a nest; there was nothing more, outside in the world, that belonged to me. It was all Dan."

"And he's the man that falls in love with an intriguing——"

"Oh, she wasn't intriguing! Just desperately loving, and perhaps not so—not so——"

"Scrupulous," Mac supplied briefly and bitterly.

"Well, are people in love ever scrupulous? He was completely bewitched—but he wasn't the first."

"Cassy, somehow it sickens me to have you defend him! Every man knows that he ought to stand by his wife and kids."

"Not if the wife steps back and the other woman tells him a convincing story. I've not forgiven him. I'm not a door mat that a man can trample on. I've taken his children away from him and made my own life complete without him. But I can't think bitterly about the old days. Even if I can't forgive, I can understand.

"Men are doing what Dan did, all the time. They'll always do it when some attractive, sweet woman convinces them that it's

the right thing to do. 'Better anything than a marriage without love!' And it sounds so independent, so free.

"And I was horribly proud. I wouldn't fight for him—except that at the end I wrote him a terrible letter, with no pride in it. But you can't be proud when you love a man so dearly—with all your heart.

"Even now, I have moods when I think Dan'll come back, perhaps after years and years, when Dulce's dead, and the children are married. And I'll cook his meals for him again, chicken and gravy and cornbread, and we'll talk about everything together. And Dan'll put up nails for me to hang my saucepans and egg beaters on, and take me to movies."

She wasn't really saying this, she thought. For there was absolute silence in the summerhouse, Tommy had disappeared, Margaret was still asleep in the hammock, and Mac was looking into space with narrowed eyes and a knitted brow and folded arms.

"It makes it nice for me," Mac said.

She roused herself, smiling, wiping her eyes.

"Poor you."

"You're everything in the world to me. I suppose I shall go on telling you so and angering you," Mac said with his precise little air of self-control, "until we are old, old people!"

"No, no," she said, shocked, "you don't anger me at all! It's only—well, I'll tell you, it makes me feel a little embarrassed. Can't you understand that? To have a person you like immensely want—well, just simply me—you——

"Mac, what a mess I'm making of this! But you know what I mean. I mean that I do like you so terribly that I love to talk to you, that you're my best friend, far and away, ahead of any other man I like! Mamma's mad about you, and the children love you, and Gertrude——"

"For the Lord's sake, leave Gertrude out!"

"Well, we all love you, and if you want to go on and on asking me if I have changed my mind, for goodness' sake, do!" Cassy said kindly. "Only just think, now and then, how uncomfortable

you'd feel if I kept asking you to do something and you had to keep saying 'no' over and over again."

"You're so extraordinarily fascinating!" Mac said fiercely, over his folded arms, looking at her sternly. Cassy, slender and brown, with her dark curls all in order, and the petals of her organdy gown spreading about her, looked up surprised, and smiled.

"I'll get you yet," he said.

"Not while Dan Wallace is alive!"

She said it quietly, in a matter-of-course tone, but it silenced him, and there was a pause.

"What part do you think Dulce would play in his return?" Mac asked then. "Supposing him to be sick of his bargain."

"I haven't thought," Cassy said calmly, gathering up her mending and choosing in her own mind the words that should ask Mac to stay and dine with her mother, the children, and herself.

And all the while Dan's brief ineloquent letter was against her heart, and that night it was under her pillow, with her brown hand holding it tight, even in her sleep.

It was a short letter; but twenty-seven ineloquent words in all.

"Cass," it began. And the abrupt appeal, so like Dan, was as precious to her as anything that followed. "I am sorry if you were unhappy, I never thought how it all looked to you. I wish some day you would let me tell you. Dan."

Chapter XXI

It was about a week later, at six o'clock in the afternoon, that Dan walked into her kitchen. The sun had set, there was a clear soft twilight under the shabby autumn trees, the chickens had long gone to bed. Dan noted, without really seeing them, a hundred familiar old details; he saw the scalded big milk pans at the kitchen door, and the pail of milk ready to be strained into them, warm, rich Jersey milk with the usual little scum of dirt and hair floating on top. He saw the big white barns and the sheds and fences against the background of the dimming hills, and he saw the old pump, with the broken-stemmed cut-glass goblet inverted on its handle, and the wood pile, and the white shafts of the apple trees rising in orderly files beyond the farmyard gate.

Once again, in the roomy old kitchen, at the end of day, he found all the familiar scents and sounds of home. The early evening was chilly, and the big stove was fired; peaches were cooking; baking was under way. Old Mrs. Pringle was in a rocker with Margaret in her lap; the young Swedish girl was at the sink. Tommy was studying at the table; beyond the passage he could catch a glimpse of the lighted dining room.

"I command vat you set dis Munchkin boy free!" Margaret shouted, looking up from her book.

"She always says that when you get to that place, doesn't she, Granny?" Tommy asked indulgently, also looking up.

Dan knocked on the doorway jamb; everyone turned. And in the silence Cassy came out of the big pantry and looked inquiringly at the visitor.

His girl, his slender, blue-aproned girl, with the dark rich cloud of hair above her earnest, thin brown face, and blue, blue eyes. Dan's throat thickened, and he could not speak; everyone else was still.

"It's Dad, Mom," Tommy presently stated. He got down from the table and went to her side, and she dropped her hand and clasped his own firm little hand without moving her eyes from the

doorway. In her other hand she carried a yellow bowl; she went to the table and set it down.

"Could I speak to you a minute?" Dan asked, clearing his throat.

"Why, of course." Cassy loosed her hold of the child's hand and glanced vaguely toward the front of the house. Then she jerked her head slightly toward the yard behind Dan. "We can talk out here," she said.

They stood on the well-remembered, deep old porch, elevated only a foot or two above the hammered smooth ground of the yard. Cassy shut the kitchen door behind her and rested in a half-sitting position against a long table that was littered with kitchen utensils, vegetables, ropes, odds and ends of small farm equipment.

"What is it?" she asked in a quiet voice, eyes suspicious and alert, breath coming fast.

"Did you get my note?" Dan asked awkwardly.

"Oh, yes. And thank you."

"I had to know—" he stumbled on, all the carefully prepared eloquence of the last long days of brooding completely forgotten "—whether you felt—hard toward me."

The woman was silent a moment, and when she spoke the meditations of lonely, humiliated months were in her answer.

"No—everything considered, I don't feel hard, Dan. I think I understand—partly. I've tried not to feel hard."

There was a pause.

"I don't know whether you got from my note that I've been worried about it lately," Dan said then, in a courageous rush. "I felt as if I'd sort of been carried off my feet—three years ago——"

"I know," Cassy conceded as he hesitated.

"I don't know whether you can understand a thing like that unless you go through it."

"The part I couldn't understand was the children, Dan," Cassy observed suddenly, reluctantly, won in spite of herself to speak.

"*They* didn't care!" he asserted quickly.

"I don't know how much they cared," Cassy pursued, after thought. "But perhaps I thought *you* would."

"Oh?" he said stupidly. "But I didn't know—I would," he added, after a pause. "I had no idea the kids—the kids counted so," he said feebly.

"They miss you. Children ought to have a father," Cassy argued, eyeing him seriously, quietly. "Of course they suffer for it. Everyone at school——

"Being Mrs. Catherine Wallace isn't Mrs. Daniel Wallace," she offered in a dead silence. "Little boys and girls like to have a father, Dan, for Christmases and birthdays."

Dan did not speak, and in the silence they heard Tommy's and Margaret's laughter rise suddenly in the kitchen and die away again, and heard the creak of the windmill in the yard. A tiny kitten mewed at Cassy's feet, and she stooped and picked it up and put it into a basket on the table that was already occupied by other crying kittens.

"Cassy, wouldn't it make you feel kinder toward me if I told you that I can't imagine what got hold of me?"

"I don't feel unkindly to you, exactly, Dan."

"You know what—what I felt—what I feel for Dulce," the man began again. "But if I had it to do over again—if most men had it to do over again——"

Cassy said after awhile:

"I suppose we all feel that we'd do things differently as we grow older."

Dan, whose face she could not see in the dusk, and who had half turned away, so that in any case she could not have seen it fully, did not move or speak. Presently she added reluctantly:

"Don't think I don't blame myself, Dan. I ought to have held you. I had the babies, I was always sloppy and tired and sick, thinking of them, perhaps not thinking enough of you! But——"

Her voice thickened treacherously. She lowered it and rushed her words to forestall the uprising tears.

"But I never dreamed you could—any more than I could—never dreamed that you and I——" she stammered.

"My God!" Dan muttered.

And suddenly, with the violence of a catastrophe, the memory

of what they two had once been to each other, their bitter knowledge of each other's arms, each other's kisses, engulfed them, and Cassy was sobbing on his shoulder, and Dan's face was pressed in the old fashion against her silky dark crown of hair.

"My God, darling, don't!"

"Oh, Danny—Danny!"

"Don't, Cass! You're killing me!"

"Danny, I've wanted this so! I've needed you so!"

Chill was creeping over the world with the autumn dark. The windmill creaked, and the kittens mewed and fussed in their lined basket. A cow, out by the barn, lowed and was still.

And there was no future, no past. Cassy was in her husband's embrace again, the remembered rapture of his hard young face pressed against hers, the grip of his big arms, the scent of tobacco and homespun and shaving soap, the old whisper above her hair, were like a great healing—were like immersion in some deep river whose waters were rest and peace.

"Oh, Dan, I've wanted you so, I've needed you so!"

"My dearest girl," he said over and over. "My old girl!"

He was crying as violently as she; after awhile they had to try to calm each other, with some fumbling for handkerchiefs and broken laughter.

"This won't do," Cassy whispered, sobbing and laughing. "The children and Mamma will think——"

"Cassy, I'm so glad I came!"

"Oh, yes, Dan, yes. It's so much better to be friends! I feel as if a flatiron had been taken off my heart!"

"As long as you forgive me!"

"Forgive you? But I always did, Dan. Only—there are different kinds of forgiveness."

"I'm not going to talk," Dan said, putting back his handkerchief, keeping his arms about her. "There's nothing for me to say. I guess I was slow growing up, Cassy. I don't know what it was. I never had much home life, never had anyone much to talk to.

But after this—it's all going to be different. It's too late for us to be happy."

"Yes, it's too late for that, Dan!" Her cheek was against his own wet cheek.

"But I'm going to save what's left to save," Dan said.

"That's all we can do."

"And this helps."

"Oh, this—" she echoed with a great weary sigh, leaning against him exhaustedly—"this helps.

"And now," she said in her ordinary tones, "you've got to go."

"Yep, that's right."

"I didn't want you to come, Dan, but now I'm so glad you came."

His answer was merely a fervent, "Gosh!"

"Shall I tell Dulce I saw you?" he asked in the old humble way.

"Oh, no, no, Dan! It can't make any difference, you know, and it would only make her miserable."

"That's right, it can't make any difference."

"What's done is done, Dan. We can't go back. We have to go on from here."

"Yes, I know. We have to go on from here."

"But so much happier, Dan!"

"All I wanted was not to have you mad at me, Cass."

"Dan, you must go."

"I know it." He lingered. "Is your mother all right?"

"Oh, wonderful. And so happy! She's never been so happy before in her life, I think."

"And the kids, are they coming on all right?" he asked a little awkwardly.

"Ah, Dan, they're marvelous!"

He gripped her hand, and turned away, and went down the two steps and across the dark, familiar yard. Cassy stood perfectly still until she heard the roar of his motor engine and saw the lights flash up, and wheel on the trees, and go down the road. Then she put her two hands over her face for a few minutes, breathing

deeply, thinking nothing, her spirit merely washing to and fro like an idle boat on the surface of the waters of deep emotion.

When she entered the house, blinking at the light, supper was ready. Cassy had the head of the table with little Tommy opposite; Mrs. Pringle and Margaret faced each other across the sides.

The proportion of the high walls of the ugly old dining room and the arched narrow fireplace had not been changed, but the former wore a paper of rich flowers and leaves now, and in the fireplace, on this cool evening, wood was blazing. At the two bay windows hung flowered curtains whose bright colors and green leaves matched the walls, and the white table stood in a soft pool of light in the center of the room.

"What'd Dan Wallace want, Cassy?"

"He's been managing that Varney ranch business for Dulce," Cassy answered innocently and evasively.

"I didn't know you ever saw him."

"I haven't—for months." Cassy served the soup from the old-fashioned tureen. "Well," she said to Margaret, "what happened to the poor Munchkin boy? Did he get out of jail?"

"Mother, you *know* what happened to him," Tommy said accusingly, "because you read me that yourself when I had the mumps."

"Yes, I know. But I've kind of forgotten."

It soon became evident to her mother at least that Cassy was in high spirits. Her color glowed, her quiet laughter was inexhaustible. After supper Thelma and Montrose Perkins, from the Sunny Nursery Dairy across the road, came over to do their homework with Tommy, and they brought Claudine, because she yelled so, and Cassy made them all happily welcome and helped the three elders through the slough of the common denominator, while Claudine and Margaret had Grandpa Pringle's chessmen to play with on the rug.

"How's your grandfather to-night, Thelma?"

"Oh, he's worse. My grandmother says she wouldn't wonder

if he would go off like my Uncle Willy did, in a spazzim," Thelma answered politely.

"He eated a shrimp!" Claudine contributed shrilly.

"An' it lay on his stommick," added Thelma impressively.

"I should think it might!"

"Cassy, you're so sweet with them," Mrs. Pringle, busy with her patience cards, murmured lovingly.

But much later, when the children were all gone, and while she was still patiently putting red eights on black sevens, and patiently shuffling and reshuffling her pack, she said suddenly:

"I don't like Dan Wallace's coming round here, Cassy!"

"You can't say that he's done it much, Mamma." There was the suggestion of an edge to Cassy's tone.

"No, I suppose not. But it seems as if it had sort of cheered you up, Cassy."

The sensitive, keen face opposite the little wrinkled one was very thoughtful; a smile tugged at Cassy's mouth, but her eyes were sad.

"If it does, Mother? Suppose it does make me feel happier to be friends with Dan again, not to have bitterness between us?"

"I don't see how you two can be friends," the older woman persisted.

"Oh, Mother, yes! Why not?"

"There's folks in the village that won't speak to him, or her either," Mrs. Pringle said darkly.

Cassy's brown cheek reddened.

"Well, they're nothing to me!" she protested proudly.

"No, of course not. Still, it isn't any too wise for you to let Dan be seen round here."

"No, I agree with you," Cassy conceded, after a moment's thought. "I don't imagine," she added, "that he has any intention of coming again; there's no reason why he should. But if he does I'll tell him that it can't be done."

Mrs. Pringle made no comment for some time. Then she said:

"You've grown to be a very remarkable woman, Cassy. Your sister Gertrude seems to know more about statuary and pictures

than you do, which is natural, I suppose, since she lives so much in Europe, but I don't know that I ever saw a better mother or a sweeter woman than you've grown to be. How any man in his senses . . ."

They had been over this ground before. Cassy, half-hearing, fell into a dream of her own.

Chapter XXII

One stormy, wet, late afternoon, just before Thanksgiving, Dan came downstairs in his orderly, luxurious house with a book in his hand. He looked out at the dripping trees and windswept hills from the window on the stairway landing and stepped to the sitting-room door a moment later to study it again.

A wet rush of wind tore into the warm, peaceful room when he opened the door; the smaller trees and shrubs in the garden were whipping and bowing in the rain. Rain smoked up like steam from the little canyons, and swept in sheets across the meadows below and the roofs of the town. The terrace was strewn with soaked leaves and dotted with shallow pools of quaking water. It was just dusk.

"Sarah," Dan said to the maid, "isn't it funny Mrs. Wallace isn't home?"

"She was just going to the club, wasn't she, sir?" responded Sarah noncommittally, adjusting lamps.

"That's all, I thought."

Dan sat down in a deep red velvet chair and tried to read. Dulce had selected this book for him as "exciting." But he did not find it as exciting as his thoughts were to-day, as they had become indeed during the last few weeks, those weeks that had elapsed since he had walked, on a certain autumn afternoon, into Cassy's kitchen.

Homesickness racked him. It flavored his food, it haunted his solitude, it made even a civil answer to loving, devoted Dulce difficult. He wanted to go back to Cassy.

A thousand resolutions a day were not strong enough to combat it. It burned in him like a fever. Nothing amused him, nothing distracted him, and the memory of that exquisite moment on a shabby, dusky kitchen porch, when he had once more had her slim, dark sweetness in his arms, was with him day and night.

He had seen her only once in the interval: on a certain Sunday when a Hallowe'en luncheon had been given at the club. Cassy

had not been at the luncheon; he and Dulce had driven up at the moment when she and Macallister Jessop had been leaving.

Cassy's car had been parked some hundred feet down the wide drive; perhaps, Dan thought, she had merely come to the club to pick Mac up after a morning of golf. Anyway, the two children had been in the back of the car, and Mac and Cassy had been walking slowly toward it.

She had worn a dark red costume with a white foxskin. Dan had sensed rather than actually seen that others than himself, in the group on the porch, had been struck with her appearance. Her small hat had been red, and the brilliant color and white fur had set off her dark brown beauty to perfection; the fresh early winter airs had reddened her cheeks, and she had been stepping along beside Mac with that old buoyancy Dan remembered; that joyous, half-dancing step that meant that all was well with her.

He had seen her a hundred times, weary and tired, sick and discouraged and overburdened; it was almost a shock to see Cassy smart, free, and back in perfect health and high spirits again. She was probably, he told himself firmly, she was probably going to marry Macallister Jessop. Mac was not particularly handsome, but everyone liked him; he was one of those quiet, bookish, kindly fellows that all women admired.

"You know, when we reached the club to-day, Dan," Dulce said to him later, "did you see that man and woman who were walking to the cars, in the direction of the tennis courts?"

"To-day?"

"To-day. Just as we reached the club. The woman was in red —awful-looking suit. That was Cassy."

"What, to-day?"

"Yes! You mean you didn't see her?"

"Is that so?"

"Yes, that was Cassy. And Mr. Jessop was with her."

"Is that so?"

"Dan—" he had known it would come—"how'd you feel if they got married?"

"Oh, I'd be delighted."

"Dan Wallace, you would not!"

"I tell you I would. He's a nice fellow."

"He doesn't look particularly exciting," Dulce had observed in a faintly dissatisfied tone.

"He's all right!"

That had ended it for the moment. But she had returned to the subject again, and every time with the query as to how Dan would feel should Cassy marry again. And every time Dan had reiterated that he would be glad of it.

In the rather unusual opportunity for undistracted musing that this wet afternoon presented, he thought of Cassy and Mac and of his reasons for saying that their marriage would please him. He knew that he was feeling what a man might feel in a terrible and inevitable crisis. Let the surgery be done and be over with; let the battle be on and the worst faced once and for all.

Let Cassy marry, and let the newspapers have their fill of it, and let Mac carry her off, brown, eager and blue eyed, on a honeymoon trip, and let it all be over—accepted, taken for granted, no longer discussed or described.

He stirred restlessly in his chair, picked up his book, threw it down again. The rain streamed and splashed steadily in the garden and from gutters and porch roofs. It was quite dark now, and still no Dulce. He began to fancy an accident. "Morado heiress killed when car overturns—Cassy, Dulce was killed this afternoon. . . ."

Dan tried to banish the dream. The telephone rang sharply, and he seized it with relief. It was Dulce, gay and laughing, talking in a breathless, rain-spattered sort of way.

"Dan, you poor darling, did you think I was drowned?"

"Where on earth are you, you runaway?"

"I'm down at the garage. I couldn't get my finger wave before the meeting, so she made me a five o'clock appointment, and then, my dear, fairly racing home, if we didn't break a spring!"

"Where are you, dear? I'll be right down."

"No, no, you won't! You stay right where you are, with your cold! No, that's what I was telephoning about, darling. The

Phippses are here—I can't talk very well," Dulce breathed, in a cautionary undertone—"and I'm bringing them home for dinner, and afterward we'll have some bridge! Is that all right, and will you tell Sarah? Oh, and dearest," she went on in an enthusiastic rush, "I went into the railroad office this afternoon, and we talked —China! My dear, it's too thrilling, wait until you see the diagrams and the plans of staterooms and everything. I'm just wild over it! Ships sail on December seventeenth, and on the twenty-fourth—but that's Christmas Eve—however, I'm bringing home all the pamphlets. . . ."

When she ended the conversation Dan sat perfectly still for a few minutes, with his face sober. He loathed the Phippses, for one thing. Darlington Phipps had been mixed up in a rather shady negotiation between the banks and the orchardmen, a few years ago, and since then he and his dashing wife had been very unpopular. The man was small, smooth, oily: "He looks so much like a crook," Cassy had once observed, "that everyone trusts him." The woman was large, pop-eyed, florid, with a mouth brimming with big crooked teeth, and a horsy laugh. She called Dulce "this dear brave little gayrle," under the impression that her accent was British, and never lost interest in the romantic topic of Dan's and Dulce's romance.

"I just envy you that big lover of yours, Dulce!" Millicent said fondly.

Dan had never liked her, and as his acquaintance with her developed he liked her less and less. Millicent was one of the zealous friends who gather up all the scandal, gossip, and rumor concerning her intimates and feel that they "ought" to hear it. It was she who told Dulce and Dan the perfectly vicious things that "people" said of them when they were first married; Dan, even in early days, was amazed to see the seriousness with which Dulce drank it all in, the fire with which she resented it and defended herself.

Millicent had been made very angry by hearing one woman say that the reason the Wallaces had got a divorce was because Mrs. Wallace refused to have any more children, and had well berated another, who had made the statement that Catherine

Wallace had taken fifty thousand dollars from Dulce to give up her claim on Dan. As for the people who stated confidently that Cassy's mother had been the whole cause of the trouble, and that Mrs. Pringle, as soon as Mr. Pringle died, had told her daughter that she should not have one penny of her money as long as she lived with that chauffeur, why, they were too numerous to mention!

Millicent Phipps denied all this loyally, she was perfectly disgusted at the cruelty of everyone; she wondered there weren't lawsuits for libel when people could talk so recklessly. And, as Dulce's best friend, she answered them all with one argument:

"Well, I wish you could come up to La Lomita with me some day and see Dulce and Dan for yourself! I've never seen such lovers in my life. They're perfectly cracked about each other, and you know it's genuine, you know it's the real thing, because they think alike, and see everything alike—they're simply made for each other!"

She had never been Dulce's best friend; even in school days, Dulce told Dan, she had despised certain things about Millie Duncan, and after their respective first marriages they had not seen anything of each other, except casually, for years. That was just one of Millie's characteristic exaggerations, that talk of intimate friendship. Everyone who knew Millie knew how harmless a gabbler she was. Dulce had said that she meant to drop her; indeed, she had dropped her.

But Millie persisted in being amiable and friendly, and lately Dulce, as the third winter of their marriage settled down wet and dark at La Lomita, had begun to say occasionally that she really must have old Millie and Darle up for dinner. To-day's accident to a motor spring had been her opportunity to invite them, evidently, without too much formality.

Dan supposed that he could be civil to them for one evening.

But there were other reasons for annoyance in Dulce's conversation. He knew exactly why she had introduced that question of a trip to China so casually into the telephone message. It was

a sort of warning to Dan that she wanted to travel, for a long time, perhaps for a year.

Dan wanted to work; indeed, he knew that he must work, that hard work alone could save him. He wanted to be back in a city, lunching with men, talking with customers, going trips on business. He wanted competition again, responsibilities, anxieties, triumphs.

He would not travel. The world was full, he said ungraciously, of rich women trotting their husbands out for exhibition; he couldn't do it. No, she liked clothes, and bridge, train and boat friendships, and shopping, but he didn't.

"Why don't you say older rich women showing off their younger handsome husbands?" Dulce asked him once, in a most unusual moment of fire.

But almost always she was sweet. She cunningly brought out all the batteries of the loving woman to keep him content. She told him ruefully that the whole stable had to be rebuilt, it was just falling apart; she challenged him artfully with the statement of a horticulturist at the club, that grapefruit could not be raised so far north.

"I'll bet we could raise it here at La Lomita, Dan!"

"I'm no farmer, Dulce. I'd rather have a job, even if I——"

"Go on, finish your sentence, dearest."

"I was going to say even if I go back to checking on the docks!"

"Were you ever a checker on the docks, Dan?"

"I was!"

"Oh, darling, what for?"

"Money."

"Oh, you idiot! And did your poor little hands get all cold and rough?"

"I'll say they did."

"Oh, my poor little boy, I'll have to come around and kiss him!" And she left her place at the table, and came around to his chair, and established herself in his lap.

But if she could be stubborn, Dan could be stubborn, too. And on this wet winter evening, wrapped in memories and musings, he

planned his stubbornness afresh. He would not go to China, and he would work.

Sarah came in, and Dan explained to her the expanded plan. There would be company for dinner. He had barely finished when the telephone rang again.

"Wait!" Dan said. "That may be Mrs. Wallace again."

On the instant the wind rose to a shriek in the dark garden outside, and the wooden house creaked and strained. Wet branches slapped at the windowpanes, and a gust of wind, coming down the chimney, sent a wave of acrid smoke through the room.

"I can't hear you!" Dan called into the telephone.

A woman's voice; not Dulce's.

"Dan—it's Tommy. He was hurt——"

"My God!" Dan said, the receiver and mouthpiece jammed suddenly against mouth and ear, in his frenzy of suspense.

"It's Cassy, Dan! Tommy——"

"Yes, yes! I hear you now. How bad is it?"

"This is Cassy, Dan."

"I hear you! What happened to him?"

"He was hurt——"

"Cassy, how badly! How badly?"

"Oh, badly, Dan. Seriously——"

"Not——"

"They say so, Dan. Can you come? He asked for you!"

"My God, my God! How'd it happen?"

"He was down at the tracks—with the bigger boys."

"Cassy, have you a doctor?"

"He's just here now, Dan."

"I'll come, dear! I'm on my way."

"Dan, will you hurry?"

"I'll be there in fifteen minutes, Cass!"

He slashed the receiver into place; the sitting-room door, the outer hall door swung wide behind him. The black wet night airs rushed in, wind swooped from the fireplace, and curtains and papers rose and struggled in the scented, luxurious living room in the coming of the storm.

Chapter XXIII

BREATHLESS, capless, coatless, his feet plunging into unexpected puddles between the house and the barn, and the wild black night howling and cracking and splashing about him, Dan ran for his car. Its suddenly blazing funnels of light picked up mirrorlike flashes from the wet foliage shaking wildly all about and the stream that was the roadbed.

Little shrubs, beaten flat and struggling like living things, rose on either side and were gone. A young madrone was down, half a mile below the house, flat in the muddy track. Dan was out of his car, had hurled it aside, and was on his way again. His automobile slipped, skidded, slewed about, and was headed for Napa once more.

No town was visible to-night except a fiery gleam of white light shone fitfully now and then through the curtains of the rain. Dan had nearly reached it when another car floundered by him, and he heard women screaming and laughing with excitement and reflected grimly, indifferently, that it must be Dulce and the Phippses.

He drove straight up the mirroring black pool of Market Street, the water fanning away from his wheels in great sweeps on either side. Few cars were abroad; drug stores sent green, blue, and orange shafts into the rain. All the windows, and his own glass guard, were jeweled and iridescent with sparkles of water. A signboard clattered from a second story as he went by, shutters were crashing everywhere, gutters ran coffee-colored floods.

Arrived at the ranch, he drove straight in, under the pear and oak trees, and went up the porch steps to the kitchen door. He opened it without knocking.

Mrs. Pringle and the big Swede girl and little Margaret were in the kitchen, with one or two silent, watching women Dan did not know. Margaret, in a diminutive bluejacket's blouse and red tie, was eating her supper at the table; she looked awed. The two women were talking at the sink. Mrs. Pringle nodded to Dan apathetically; both she and Inga had been crying.

"How is he?" Dan asked.

"He's just the same, Dan," Cassy's mother answered. And in the silence she slowly, significantly shook her head.

"Where's Cassy?"

"She's in there with him." The older woman jerked her head in the direction of the room off the kitchen that Cassy had turned into a playroom years ago.

"In there, huh?"

"You're sopping," Mrs. Pringle said vaguely.

"Can I go in?"

"Joe Mukes was down at the switch with his car," one of the women said, "and he rushed him here. Little Bud Hellman held Tommy all the way; they never thought they'd get him into the house alive."

Dan took off his spattered coat; somebody took it away. He went to the stove, shaking with chill, his eyes not leaving the women's faces as he warmed his hands.

"They haven't even taken his stockings off yet," another woman contributed.

They all spoke in hushed tones, with occasional glances at the playroom door, which was ajar a few inches. In the brightly lighted, hot kitchen they moved and looked like ghosts.

"Cassy telephoned you," Mrs. Pringle said, "but after the doctor looked at him she wouldn't let go of him. She's afraid he'll move."

"Mrs. Wallace drove me home from the club," one of the women said. "It was about half-past four, and we'd no sooner got here than she asked, 'Where's Tommy?' "

"She don't like him late because it begin to rain," the Swedish girl contributed in a soft, wondering voice.

"Well, she told me to come in anyway, and she'd give me a sample of her ice-box cake," the first woman said. "So we were sitting in here talking—this must have been 'round five—and we heard a noise in the yard. She started up—she was so relieved! She said, 'There's Tommy now, someone's given him a lift!' And

with that the Hellman boy opened the door and said, 'Tommy's been all mashed to pieces, Mrs. Wallace!' "

Dan winced. The women gasped audibly, together.

"She ran out to the car—well, of course, none of us knew what we did!" pursued the neighbor. "He was all crumpled up and sort of whining—wasn't he making the most awful sound, Inga?"

"It was the boys' club day, but the director thought it was going to rain, and they couldn't hike, so he dismissed them," Mrs. Pringle supplied. "So they all got fooling, down at the tracks."

"Getting him out of the car, and then when the doctor started to examine him—it was awful!" the other woman said. "They aren't going to touch him again. Dr. Williams went to get Dr. Charles; they're both coming back."

"Are they going to get him into the hospital?" Dan asked.

"Oh, no, they can't move him," Mrs. Pringle said apathetically, almost reproachfully. "Cassy asked the doctor how long it would be, and he said that Tom couldn't possibly live through the night."

Suddenly her face was convulsed, and she began quietly to cry. The other women cried. Dan sat down at the table and rested his head on his hand.

"Does he know anything?' he asked presently.

"Oh, yes. They've given him—stuff, you know," the neighbor woman said, "to ease off the pain. He doesn't seem to be in any pain at all now. He was talking quite clearly. Dr. Williams said he was completely smashed to pieces inside, and that sometimes when things were as bad as that they don't feel much."

"But he asked for you, the first thing. He must have been a little confused," Mrs. Pringle said, drying her eyes, speaking with difficult self-control. "He thought you were upstairs, taking a nap. He kept saying, 'When Dad wakes up I wish he'd come in,' and Cassy telephoned you right away."

Dan could imagine the sturdy little voice from the wrecked little body. "When Dad wakes up——"

When Dad wakes up, indeed! He winced again.

"I've never seen him look as handsome as he did this morning," Tommy's grandmother said. She stood, a thin, drab, sunken figure in a gray dress, her gray head drooping laxly sideways, as if she had no longer the vitality to hold it erect. She had a clean folded handkerchief in her hand, damp from much quiet pressing against her continually filling eyes. "Cassy always calls for him at school, or one of us does," she went on. "But this morning he reminded her it was club day—a bunch of those little fellows goes out once a week with the teacher, the natural history class, they call it. 'How'll you get home?' Cassy asked him. 'Oh, they take the school bus!' he said. And that was all—until they brought him in."

"My God, and isn't there anything we can do?" Dan whispered.

"They say not. They say they think his ribs 're all broken in." The strange woman's voice stopped.

"Oh, my God, it seems too awful for Cassy," her mother said, crying.

The Swedish girl put a strong young arm about her.

"Maybe get vell, now," she offered comfortingly.

"Do they give us any hope?" Dan asked, stricken.

The heads were all shaken, lips pursed, doubtful eyes narrowed. Fear seized upon his heart and tore at it with slow fingers.

White, serious, and noiseless, a trained nurse came out of the sickroom.

"Mrs. Wallace heard your car," she said, without preamble, to Dan. "She wants you to come in."

Dan followed her without a word, feeling himself big and wet and stumbling in this place of women and silence and waiting.

There was only one light lighted in the playroom, and that had been dulled with twisted pink tissue paper; a softened glow spread through the big apartment, Dan was dimly conscious of blocks, trains, and shelves of shabby big gay books for a background. The wide square couch whereon Tommy had once fought the boldest of his anti-nap fights was holding Tommy again; there

was a confusion of big pillows, striped soft tan and brown blankets, and plunged among them the child's long body. Cassy was in a low rocker—the rocker she had used when she was nursing Margaret, the rocker that old Granny used to say was a great "traveler"—beside the bed. She had on a dark brown gown with a fold of something creamy at the open neck and folds of chiffon at her brown wrists. Her rich dark hair was disordered and had slipped to a curly coil on her shoulders. She looked over her shoulder as Dan came in, and her blue eyes widened, but without a smile.

"Don't move, Tom!" her quiet voice said warningly. And at the sound of it a torrent of love and agony rose in Dan's heart, and he began to tremble with exquisite pain.

He went to the foot of the bed and managed a smile. Tom, lying flat on his back, smiled back from a lean little face that had paled under brownness and sunburn.

"You look all right, Tom!" Dan said, in an uneven voice, clearing his throat.

"I'm all right!" Tommy whispered.

"Don't move," Cassy said again inflexibly. "He must not move," she said to Dan over her shoulder. "If he feels that he is going to cough again, he is going to tell me, and then we're to hold him."

"Hold him where?" Dan asked, kneeling down on the other side.

"Everywhere—anywhere, Dan. I have his hands, Miss Stone will hold his body, you take his shoulders. He mustn't move."

"Something broken?" Dan whispered, afraid of silence.

"We don't know. We think a rib or two are broken; they couldn't touch him."

"Why not?"

"Afraid to move him, Dan. It's inside."

She glanced significantly down at her hands, and Dan's look followed hers. He saw that the child's hard, grubby young hands, and Cassy's thin, brown, memorable fingers were welded together with drying red enamel, and that the blanket was stained with splotches of the same ominous brick color.

"It may not mean anything," he breathed, smiling reassurance at Tommy.

"We don't know," answered Cassy. "Taking him out of Joe Mukes's car," she said, "and then again—about half an hour ago, after the doctor had roused him . . .

"Once more," she began again, with a steady, significant look, after a silence. "Once more would be . . ."

She did not say "the end," but Dan's heart finished the phrase.

"Just keep perfectly still, Tom. Don't move. It won't be for long, dear. But if we could just give that miserable cut, inside, whatever it is, a chance to heal over—even the tiniest bit.

"It's just like a nosebleed, sweetheart. You know how still you have to keep until it stops?"

Her tone was composed and quiet, there was nothing dramatic in voice or manner. After the bright staring forlornness of the kitchen, the crying, whispering women, the colors in this room were rich and soft, and Cassy, brown skinned, black haired, blue eyed, crouching against the tumble of brown and creamy blankets on the bed, looked like some old painting, vivid and gypsy-like in the dull pink glow.

The boy was like his mother, but he would be taller some day. His hands were as big as hers now. His face was lean and lighted, as Cassy's was, by sapphire-blue eyes in black lashes; he looked all boy, at seven and a half, but Dan noticed the baby softness and straightness of the throat that his opened shirt exposed. He was only partly undressed, he still wore wet, bloody, mud-stained little linen knickerbockers, but they had been unbuckled at the knee, and loosened at the belt, not to bind him. Against the white pillow lay the great mop of soft black plumage that was his hair, hair thicker and more dense than Cassy's, and formed into loose waves rather than ringlets, as hers was.

Little Tommy of the croupy and colicky nights, Tommy of the "best romper" and the "other buggy-robe," was lying very still now, in this room full of toys and Jungle Books and strange dull pink light. Dan could remember when Tommy always wanted

the egg beater to play with at breakfast, and the day he said "Cert'n'y!" when his father asked him if he was hungry.

"We were on top of the car, down near the tanks," Tommy suddenly volunteered, in a faint, raw, clear little voice. "And I jumped. I don't think I oughter of jumped."

"Why'd you jump?" Dan asked, in a gruff, gentle echo of his own voice.

"Cause Ben said maybe they were startin' for Chicago!"

"Another time," Dan said mildly, "I wouldn't jump."

"No, sir, I won't, Dad," Tommy promised.

A silence. The two doctors had come noiselessly in; Cassy looked at them expectantly, but did not move. Dan sensed rather than saw them in the shadows.

"Dad, I thought you were upstairs asleep. I forgot you'd gone away."

"You were sort of dopey, I guess."

"Gee, it knocked my wind out!"

"I'll bet it did."

"Don't move, Tommy."

"I won't, Mom. Dad, can you stay here now?"

"Yep."

"Ainchoo goin' back?"

"Nope."

He shut his eyes, opened them again, with all a little boy's adoration for his mother in their blueness that was so like her own.

"Could I go to sleep, Mom?"

Her glanced flickered to the shadows for a tenth of a second, returned. She nodded. And Dan knew from the deepening pallor of her weary, patient face that the doctors, behind him, had merely shrugged. It didn't matter what Tom did now.

"If you don't move, Tom."

The minutes began to wheel by, and were hours. Dan thought, as they slowly passed, that Cassy was like the hub of a wheel, and all of them, the others, nurses, horrified arriving neighbors and friends, doctors, her mother, even the little invalid himself,

were merely the spokes. She held them all in that iron quiet grip of hers that was typified of her hold on the brown, bloody little hands.

Tommy dozed, roused, talked animatedly, dozed again.

"Weaker," the nurse said to Cassy, bending over to wipe his mouth with a bit of cotton.

"He's had no dinner," Cassy responded resolutely.

Outside of the old farmhouse in the dark, rain fell spattering; gutters dripped. Little sudden trickles of accumulated water broke suddenly across the other monotone of the swishing trees, the creaking branches, the swooping and whining of the wind.

Now and then an especially vicious onslaught shook the building. But through it all the lamp burned softly on, untroubled, and the brown thin hands held steadily the little boy's hands that were varnished with dull vermilion.

After awhile Dan found himself in the kitchen; the old room seemed as brightly lighted, as hot and unnatural as before. Strange figures were there; Inga had disappeared, Margaret was gone; clocks said strange hours.

The clock over Inga's sink said twenty minutes to three. One of the doctors was having coffee and toast; Mrs. Pringle was sitting opposite him, but she was not eating. She had changed her clothes for a thick wrapper, her faded eyes were swollen, her face an unhealthy white; she looked as if she were dying.

"Almost twelve hours of it," Dan said, sitting down.

"Yes, yes," the doctor agreed gravely. "Tremendous resistance."

"Will you have a cup of coffee?" an unknown woman asked gently.

"No, thanks. Nothing."

"Terrible thing," the doctor commented sympathetically. "Her only child, eh?"

"No, there's a girl."

"You're her brother?" the doctor asked Dan.

"I'm—the child's father."

"Ah, I see. Terrible thing!" the doctor repeated, shaking his head.

Dan planted his elbows on the table. His tortured eyes, haggard in his handsome young face, stared straight into those of the other man.

"No chance?" he asked steadily, unemotionally.

"No, no, I'm afraid not. Dr. Williams thinks this might go on for another twenty-four hours. But I don't believe it. There is a decided weakening," the doctor answered, pursing his lips. "You see, in cases of this kind the great danger . . ."

He became technical. Dan hated him.

A few minutes later, back in the sickroom, he whispered to Cassy.

"Could I bring you some coffee?"

Her alert blue eyes moved from Tommy's face.

"Hot milk," she answered in her sensible, natural voice. Dan felt in his heart an uprushing of absolute adoration for this brown, quiet woman with the shining, mystical blue eyes and the blood-coated hands. She was saving them all as much as she could; she would save them to the very end.

When he noiselessly returned, with the hot glass in his big, clumsy hands, she loosened one of her own for the first time, to steady it while she drank. Tommy watched her.

"That looks good, Mom," he whispered.

Cassy's glance instantly moved to the doctor's face. The new doctor was going now, but he had come silently in to have a look at the patient before he left.

"I wouldn't advise any nourishment, no," he said, in a low voice. "It probably would not do any harm, but I shouldn't advise it, no. If we should start the spasmodic irritation . . ."

"But it wouldn't do any harm unless it made him cough?" Cassy asked.

"No—on the contrary——"

"Get me a silver dessert spoon, Miss Stone," Cassy directed. "I'm going to feed you as if you were a baby, Tom," she said cheerfully.

They watched her; Tommy's eyes following the spoon gratefully as the few warm drops trickled from its almost empty bowl into his eager little mouth. He tired of it, and she stopped instantly and quietly finished the glass herself.

"How often may I do that, Doctor?"

"Well—as often as he likes, certainly."

Her hands were free now. Dan importuned her anxiously: "Cassy, you've had nearly twelve hours of this—it's four o'clock. Won't you go rest?"

"Yes," she agreed, after a second's frowning thought. "But you'll be here, Dan?" she asked.

She came back more than an hour later, with a red spot on her cheek, like that on the face of a child who sleeps motionless and deep. And as she took her place beside the sleeping child again Dan got her first weary, encouraging smile—Cassy's old gallant smile, the smile she had given him on that blazing night when this child had been born.

Then it was his turn to go to the kitchen, to eat and drink whatever the women put before him. The rain had stopped now. Lights were still burning brightly and unnaturally in the kitchen, but when Dan stepped to the porch door and stood looking out at the yard it was gray with a strange, cold winter dawn. The clock behind him struck six.

He went out. The dooryard was filled with great puddles, the trees were still heavy with rain. No air was stirring this morning, the cosmos and asters of Cassy's side garden were beaten flat to the earth, and the pumpkins, lying in a tangle of yellowed vines in the field beyond, were spattered with mud.

But toward the east, behind the little rise of ground where the barns and windmill stood, the sky was turning opal, and great masses of dark cloud, tipped with watery pink, were moving away in drifts that were black against the brightness beyond. And as he stood there, numb and stupid after the strain of the long night, Dan heard a rooster crow far away and one of the nearer cocks answer it, a sound infinitely heartening in the cool morning, and he saw the first lances of the morning light strike

across the great motionless flanges of the mill and burn dazzling in diamonds among the wet leafy upper branches of the oaks.

Strangely, the householder's quiet pride suddenly arose within him. These were his acres, this was his spreading farm of bare fruit trees and newly turned fields; these were his barns and sheds and fences, his cattle filing down from the pasture, his cocks welcoming the morn. He was looking at his dooryard with its muddy earth and wide puddles mirroring a pink winter sky, his chopping block and wood pile, his pump and windmill, tool-house and chicken runs.

And this was his home behind him, kitchen and coffee pot, pegs to hold blue aprons, winding, old-fashioned back stairway, shabby old wide rooms looking out into oaks and pampas grasses. It was his little daughter, who was upstairs asleep now; his little gallant brown boy who was fighting for life in the old playroom. And above all, it was his girl—his sweetheart—who was in there, beside that couch, fighting for her firstborn with all the force of her own great soul. She belonged to him, forever and forever, with her blue aprons and her blue eyes, her good days and bad, her cooking, her planning, her picnics; her sweet, wise talk over winter fires. He wanted—he needed nobody else.

Suddenly she stood beside him; Cassy, in a gray wrapper like the old wrapper of long ago. Dan turned, quickly, paling, but she shook her head.

"No—just the same. They sent me out for a breath of air."

He put his arm about her, the weary, pale, broken, burdened woman who was infinitely dearer in this strange moment of dawn than ever she had been to him in her girlhood, and they looked at the brightening world together. Dan, exhausted, shamed, sick in every fiber of his being with remorse and regret, still felt himself strangely purified in soul, felt the birth of something new within him.

"Isn't it all like a dream, Dan?" Cassy said, after a silence. "You coming into our library, in the old house in the Mission, so long ago, and our running away, that night . . .

"And the Shotwell Street house, Dan, and our Saturday after-

noon parties—with a dollar to spend, and the little apartment to get back to. . . .

"Remember the night I was so wretched, before Tom came, and your buying me a hot-water bottle and making me tea? The most delicious tea I ever tasted. . . .

"And Dan, remember the day we came up here, when it was so sweet and hot and springlike, and Tom was so good on the boat? We had lunch downtown that day, at the Palais Royale, remember? And then we came out here.

"You'll never know what he's been to me during these three years. He's been more than a child, Dan. He seems to understand."

Dan looked at her, with the sunrise shining in her tired face, and his love for her, his need of her, shook him like terror. To have his wife leaning against him again, to have her fingers tightly holding his was more than he could bear.

Tears came into his eyes, and he said:

"Cass, what can I do?"

She did not answer. She stood resting against him, her eyes on the sunrise.

"This time yesterday morning," she presently began, "he was safe in his own little bed, with his dog beside him. . . .

"That's the sort of thing mothers go crazy remembering, Dan."

"Don't break down now, Cass. You've been so wonderful!"

"No, no, I'll not break down. But somehow I can't believe that Tommy's going away from me, Dan." She paused, and added under her breath, "He seems such a little fellow to me."

"Don't!" Dan said thickly, and she was still.

"Everything you've ever thought of me," he began after a pause, "everything you've ever known about me—I see now. I want you to know it. I want you to know that I despise myself—that I could kill myself, except that it would hurt you. You'd pity me, Cass, if you could have looked into my soul, this last hour, out here alone, and realize what I've been feeling. You couldn't despise me more than I despise myself!"

"I don't despise you, Dan," she said trembling.

"I see what I had, Cass, and what I've lost. Maybe there isn't any other hell than that."

"No, there couldn't be any worse hell than that, Dan. But it wasn't all your fault, we were both in it," Cassy said.

"I've spoiled it all," Dan went on. "But I want you to know that I love you—the way you might have wanted me to, once! You're in my mind and my soul all the time, Cass. There isn't an instant of the old days that I don't remember."

"Nor I," she said, in the silence.

"I think all the time of working my way back—to you and the kids and the kitchen. . . .

"I don't mean hurting anyone, breaking anything up——"

He floundered, and she said quietly: "No, we've had enough of that."

"But some day mightn't we be back together, Cass? Mightn't there be some way?"

"Oh, Danny, if there might be! I get so lonesome, all alone!"

For one moment her beloved dark head was against his shoulder in the old way, and their cheeks were together.

Then Cassy, suddenly resuming her usual quiet, restrained air, said that she must go in to Tommy again, and Dan said that he would go in, too.

They were turning toward the kitchen door when a woman came quickly and quietly about the corner of the house, a pretty woman, warmly furred, with a look of deep concern upon her handsome face.

Cassy shrank back a little; she had not met Dulce face to face since their happy neighborhood intimacy had ended, three years ago. But Dulce came swiftly up the steps from the yard, and took Cassy's hands, and looked at her lovingly, sympathetically, sorrowfully. Dan she did not seem to see.

"Tell me, how is he?" she breathed.

Tired, confused, heartsick, Cassy was taken unawares. Her lips trembled, and her voice broke.

"He's dying," she faltered in sudden tears.

"Oh, Dan, no!" Dulce exclaimed in horror, and then, as Cassy turned and left them, disappearing within the kitchen door, Dulce caught both his hands and lifted her shocked face to him.

"What a night you must have had! I couldn't sleep, worrying. Dan, she looks so tired, poor Cassy! My darling, I've brought soups and rolls and preserves—I didn't know what to bring. At first I was going to bring you all your shaving things, and clean shirts, and so on, but it seemed to me, darling, that it'd be much, *much* wiser for you to come home and take your bath all nice and comfy, and then—if you must, come back again after breakfast. Or I could stay, Dan. I told Sarah that she'd just have to wait and see what we decided to do. Now, shall we stay, or shall we go back for baths and breakfast and then come down again? It's only a few minutes, you know. I knew—" she put her hands on his shoulders, pressed against him—"I knew you wanted your wife beside you, last night," she said. "But when I telephoned it seemed as if it might be any minute—and it was pouring.

"But, anyway, I'm here now, dearest, and absolutely at your orders. I'll do *anything!* I only want to make it easiest for you and show Cassy how terribly I feel."

He looked toward the kitchen, looked down at her seriously; Dan's kind, patient look.

"I think you and I had better go—home," he said.

"You mean to La Lomita?" She brightened; it was what she wanted to do, get her beloved boy off to herself and comfort him. "But are you sure that's what you really want to do, Dan?" she asked scrupulously.

"Yes, that's the wisest thing to do."

"You're not needed here, darling?"

"No," he said under his breath, "I don't belong here."

She slipped her arm through his as they walked to the car together. The sun had risen now, and a clear winter morning was flooding cool sunshine over the wet, cold world.

Chapter XXIV

After that, for six long days and nights Dan's impression of Cassy was of some heroic creature, bound and helpless, desperately struggling for freedom against overwhelming odds. Twenty hours out of every twenty-four she spent in the sickroom; she snatched only such casual meals and hours of sleep as coincided with Tommy's own quieter times.

For the rest she crouched there beside him, a brown shadow, with blue eyes fixed on his face. Her hands held his through nights of vigil, and when the little boy fretted and twisted restlessly on his pillows her soothing voice was close beside him.

"You must keep perfectly still, Tom. This is Mother, dear, taking care of you. You've been wonderful. You're going to be out playing with the boys in no time if you'll keep this up. But you mustn't move, Tom."

She would stagger out of the sickroom dazed and pale, her eyes bewildered. At such times she hardly seemed to know what she was doing, or eating, or what was going on about her.

"No hope, no hope, no hope," said the voices all about her. The town rang with the opinion; the little Wallace boy couldn't get well. But Cassy went steadily on, holding the precious little brown body still among the blankets, dropping milk from the silver dessert spoon into the blistered little mouth.

"Cassy, you'll be ill too!" one of the women who loved her pleaded one day. "You know—you know that Tommy can't—we all know—you can't keep him——"

"Well, I have him *now!*" Cassy answered stubbornly, weeping. And she went back into the sickroom.

Dan came every day, sometimes staying through the endless nights of bright kitchen lights and noiseless moving forms, sometimes sleeping at La Lomita and joining Cassy during the hard morning hours. Tommy always asked for him, and seemed more peaceful, even when dozing, or in the half-conscious hours under opiates, when Dan was close beside him.

Margaret shared many a vigil with her father. She was a tall,

proud child, at six, with a mane of tawny gold falling on the collars of her little bluejacket's blouses. She consulted Dan about her ties and her kindergarten problems. She told him that a girl had cried in school and the other girls all called her "Cry-baby!" And another girl had an aunt that gave her a colored baby doll, and she hid it.

" 'Cause she was ashamed to have a black baby when all our babies are white!" Margaret explained, with shocked blue eyes fixed on his.

She sat in his lap at night, in the kitchen, a warm bundle of delicious confidential babyhood, in the woollies with the buttons down the back, and the closed feet that made her small extremities look like the picture of the Brownie in the Brownie book. In the next room they could occasionally hear Tommy's weak voice, saying, "Mom." The nurses came and went. Inga was always there, and usually another woman or two, and Margaret's little faded grandmother had her green-topped table and played red knaves on black queens and black threes on red fours, hour after hour after hour.

"Listen, Dad, there was a French lady, and she had sheep, you know, and we have her in our French class. And she had a cat, and she said, 'Don't you dare put your foot in my cheese'—'cause she had a cheese that she made. And so the cat di'n't stick her paw in the cheese, but she stuck her chin in, and the French lady killed her—wasn't she mean? Why did she kill her, Dad?"

"I don't know, darling. Frenchwomen are sort of excitable, you know."

"I'd kill *her!*" Margaret said vengefully.

Uncle Mac had given her the Brownie book, and Uncle Mac said that he would bring her some guinea pigs when he came up, next time, only Mother said they would give her ringworms.

"Dad, if you were a turkey, would you like to be fattened all up and then *et?*"

"I don't believe they think it out, Baby."

"Tommy said if he was a turkey he'd eat poison, and then when the people ate him they'd eat the poison, and then they'd die!"

And she would laugh heartily and enchantingly, a warm little rosy creature tangled in a mop of silky bright hair and scented with bath soap and clean fresh woollies.

On the sixth day after Tommy's accident Cassy and the nurse and the doctor came out of his room together. There was a strange expression on all three faces.

"I don't understand it," the doctor said.

Cassy sat down at the table and looked patiently, expectantly into his face.

"Normal!" the nurse said, in an explanatory aside to Dan, displaying her clinic thermometer.

"I took it on both thermometers," the doctor said.

"Dr. Charles said yesterday——" Miss Stone began, and paused.

"Yes, I know he did." They spoke of a superficial abrasion.

"Don't—don't give me any hope!" Cassy, stirring her untasted cup of tea, looked up to say steadily, warningly, with a haggard face.

"Oh, come," old Dr. Williams rallied her. "You're the one who's been keeping us all afloat!"

She put her two brown hands over her face and broke into awkward, reluctant schoolgirl crying.

And the seventh day from that one became a part of family history as the occasion When Tommy Could Have a Boiled Egg.

Dan and Cassy went walking in the quiet woods of mid-December. It was noon, and in the oak groves behind the ranch they could hear the whistles in Napa, shrilling the hour. The morning had been frosty, with scarfs of fog lying on the hills, but now the sun was shining hotly, beating down from a clear blue sky, and Cassy's face grew rosy under the brown, and her dark hair stuck to her temples with moisture.

She had on a brown homespun skirt, short and pleated, and heavy tan-and-brown stockings, and blunt Indian oxfords whose fringes enhanced the delicacy of her ankles. Her creamy sweater

was pulled well down over her hips, her brown hands hidden in fringed beaded gloves, and her rough little creamy hat half hid her face.

In the shade of an enormous madrone she suddenly sat down flat, like a child, with her sturdily booted feet stretching down the leafy grade, and the valley lying like a great cup below her. She looked at him with all a child's friendliness too, a little breathless, pleased to have conquered the hill.

"Whew! What a climb! Look, Dan, that's our new picnic place. Mac and I and the children found it last summer. See where we cleared?"

"What eyes she has! No one else in the world has eyes like hers," Dan thought. He did not speak.

"We have a grill and a coffee pot in that hollow log," she volunteered. Dan was stabbed by the picture; he knew Cassy's inexhaustible picnic baskets, the smoke of the little fire rising up into the sweet, aromatic air, the children climbing in oaks whose spreading low boughs were pierced with the shafts of the sinking sun. Macallister Jessop would be comfortable on the dry, thick leaves, smoking, and watching her, and talking.

"Mac's here a good deal?"

The blue eyes moved to his face; she considered a second.

"Well, yes. He owns the old Varney place—you knew that."

"And do you like him, Cassy?"

Again she appeared to reflect. She laughed briefly.

"Well, of course I do!"

"He likes you, doesn't he?" Dan persisted.

Her eyes widened. She nodded.

"Does he want to marry you, Cass?"

"Oh, yes!" she said simply.

"H'm!" Dan muttered.

"And am I going to marry him?" Cassy pursued it quietly. "No, I think not."

He looked up quickly.

"You think not?"

"No. Although I do like him, indeed I love him," Cassy said frankly. "He's most entertaining, Dan, he reads everything, he's interested in everything. He stimulates me, tremendously.

"He's lovely with the children, too. He's one of the nicest persons I ever knew, with children. He and Tom talk as if they were of an age. And of course he adores Margaret—everyone does, everyone always will. She's got—what you've got.

"But I don't think of marriage at all. Perhaps I'm a one-man woman."

And she smiled at him composedly; there was even a glint of humor in her blue eyes. Dan realized suddenly how amazingly she had developed, how she had grown up in the last few years. Cassy was no longer a gypsy girl. It was a finished, most appealing woman who was sitting there, in her rough browns and creamy wools; there was a definiteness about her fine mouth that he had not remembered, there was a self-possession about her whole aspect that filled his heart with a sort of humble adoration.

Her very person seemed changed, too; he always thought of Cassy as the slim, flat, boyishly wild young creature who had danced along at his side through the tawdry, brightly lighted streets of the Mission in San Francisco on long-ago Saturday nights. But to-day she seemed different: her brown hand had vitality and rounded beauty, her deepened breasts lifted the cream-colored sweater into two little hillocks that moved with her quick breath. In her blue eyes there was a new light, the tempered, tender, starry light of full-blown womanhood.

"Cassy must be thirty," Dan thought. But the unconquerable girlishness persisted, too, in the set of her rowdy hat, the alert eager look of her eye, and the slim legs stretched comfortably below her on the slight fall of the ground. Looking at her, it seemed to him unbelievable that they two had been man and wife, had shared all the ecstasy of young love together. Their divorce and his re-marriage, and now this disturbing suggestion that she might marry again, too, had restored to her a sort of re-

moteness, a virginity that made him feel as far away from her as any other man in a world of men.

"Oh, if you died, Dan," she was saying ruminatingly. "I can easily imagine that I would marry then, and that it would be Mac! There's a terrible loneliness about having no man in your life—a sort of lopsidedness."

He rolled over on the dry, sharp oak leaves; his tawny head was close to her knee.

"Do you mean to say, Cass, that you still can love me as you did when we first loved each other?"

"More," she said equably. "Love's like anything else. You learn how to do it."

"I haven't been thinking much of myself lately, Cass." He cleared his throat. "It seems queer to me that anyone ever loved me."

"Ah, Danny, if you only knew how much!"

"I don't—no man deserves to have a woman love him," Dan said.

"I don't think *deserving* has anything to do with it," Cassy observed judicially.

"Dan," she said in a silence, during which he had dropped his face on his hands among the leaves, "I wonder how it ever happens that persons who love each other as much as we did can fall out so terribly. It seems as if we *must* have made it up, that last time, as we had so many times before. What makes one quarrel the final quarrel, do you suppose? We'd been getting on each other's nerves, all that winter, when both the children were sick."

"My God, I don't know!" he muttered, without raising his head, as she paused.

"But I never thought of us as parting, Dan. I never thought of myself as anything but your wife!" She fell silent. "I never do," she added after a moment, very quietly.

Dan did not speak.

"Tell me again what Dulce said," Cassy presently commanded.

The man reared up his tumbled fair head with a great sigh.

"It wasn't that she said so much," Dan said. "It was just that —well, I suppose I knew she was bound to say it."

"After all, she has her side," Cassy conceded.

"Oh, sure she has!"

"It's been making her unhappy?"

"Yes. But I knew that."

"She has been generous," Cassy said suddenly.

"You don't know how generous, for Dulce," Dan answered. "It has been hard for her—feeling herself shut out!"

Cassy laughed mysteriously, ruefully.

"It is too terrible!" she said, sobering. "It is too terrible to have you and me, hanging over the sickbed of a mortally wounded child, and talking about shutting Dulce Varney out!"

"Oh, I know."

"But what'd she say, Dan?"

"Well, just that she thought that she had been considerate enough, and that now, when Tommy was getting well, she felt that we ought to consider appearances . . ."

Cassy listened with a thoughtful face; presently she nodded.

"I suppose so," she said, with a sigh.

"Dan," she asked, in a silence, "did you ask Dulce not to come here all this time?"

"Not right out. Not directly, no."

"But I suppose she gathered it?"

"I suppose so. Anyway," Dan said, "as far as she's concerned it's over. Dulce's warm-hearted, you know, but she's jealous. She —well, that's natural enough, too, I suppose. But she suggested that she and I take Tommy somewhere for a trip. Honolulu or somewhere."

"Ha!" Cassy ejaculated involuntarily.

"She meant it generously," Dan argued wretchedly, anxiously.

"She *has* been generous," Cassy said again. She was silent for a moment. The winter sunshine shone down warm and clear on the woodland and on the shining roofs of the town below. There were galleons of white cloud moving slowly over a blue sky; the distant mountains looked pale blue and as transparent as gauze.

They could hear quail drumming somewhere in the woods. Now and then a bird, close at hand, gave a surprised little squawk, or a chipmunk flashed across their view, stood at attention, and vanished again. In the air there was a faint humming buzz, the organpoint of midsummer.

"I wonder how many persons would go back again, if they could, after a divorce, Dan?"

"I was thinking of that the other day."

"People who get blue and discouraged and worry about money and think it's—each other," Cassy pursued it ineloquently.

"I know." Dan broke a dry twig into inch lengths, laid them in the pattern of a little bonfire on the leaves. "It seems like something that *happened* to us, Cass," he said. "Something we had nothing to do with."

"It does to me. I can remember us, tired and worried and cross, and the children sick, and nothing but dishes and wet cribs and bad nights, but—looking back, I can't seem to remember why we thought a divorce would help."

"There was Dulce—and my being a damn fool," Dan added.

"Oh, yes," she conceded. "But then there is always someone like Dulce, and unless there's an opening somewhere it doesn't matter. If it hadn't been you and Dulce it might have been me and somebody. But the point is, it's so easy to slide into trouble and so hard to understand afterward just why you didn't see it coming!"

Her tone was so quiet that he looked into her face wistfully.

"Doesn't it matter to you at all, Cass?"

"It did."

"It doesn't now?"

"Not the old bitter way. But if I had it all to do over again," Cassy said, with an air of brevity, of dismissing the subject, "I'd do it differently. It wouldn't happen."

Dan said nothing. His head went down once more into his hands.

"We didn't dramatize it enough, Dan. We didn't realize that the whole thing—babies, kitchen, health, poverty, was like a—

oh, well, a play—or an ocean flight, it was our acid test. And we failed! We're not the only ones. Thousands of other men and women are failing too, the same way.

"All we had to do was wait! The garage was going to make money, my father was going to die and leave me money, and even this ranch is much more than self-supporting now. My Swedes are always sending home for more cousins and brothers; *they* must be satisfied, even with the rent they pay!"

"Don't rub it in."

"I was horridly bitter about it for awhile," she resumed presently. "But—it's always hard for me to stay mad, Dan. Things got more comfortable, and I had Tommy, and Margaret, and after awhile—after awhile I just came to see it as just part of the general stupidity of the world—your not being trained about marriage, my knowing nothing, and thinking that all this difficulty, work, and discouragement was a cataclysm especially planned for you and me."

"I can't put it the way you do, Cass. But that's the way I've come to see it, too."

She got to her feet, brushed leaves and twigs from her clothes.

"This is the end, then, Dan?" she said. They began to walk down the almost obliterated old wagon road that led through the oaks and madrone trees. "Then we've got to make it the end," she added. "No compromise now. Tell Dulce you're not going to see me any more, and *don't* see me. Don't telephone, and don't think about it. There's no other way out."

Dan walked beside her in silence.

"There's no other way out that I can see," she reiterated.

"No, I don't see any other way," the man agreed.

"As soon as Tommy can move, probably in January, we're going down to Mac's place at Carmel," Cassy said. "He has a lovely place there, close to the water, among the pines, and Tommy'll pick up faster there than anywhere, Dr. Williams says."

"I lose the children, too."

"Yes, I was thinking of that."

They were talking quietly, with pauses between the brief phrases.

"It's been—heaven, having the kids again."

"It's been heaven to me, having you back in the house—*feeling* you there all the time." She turned to him very simply. "I don't know why, but I love you, Dan!" she said.

Dan said nothing.

"I know I can do it," Cassy said in a different, a more businesslike voice, "because I have done it. I can devote myself to the children, and Mother, and I can forget. Or try, anyway, to forget. And that's what I have to do. There's nothing else to do."

"I can do it, too. I'll get to work," Dan said.

"It's the only thing that'll pull us out, Dan."

"I know it. I'll get into something—hard."

They came to a high meadow, just above and behind the rambling colony of the barns, stables, sheds, and corrals. Below them lay a tangle of fences and paddocks, and beyond these again the bare trees in the home orchard, the willows and peppers around the farmhouse, and the old house itself, with plumes of gray smoke rising straight to the sky from the red chimneys. Toward the highway ran the pretentious, towering lines of the poplars and eucalyptus that Cassy's grandfather had planted when the homestead was new, when the first Catherine Pringle, in a bustle, and a waterfall of rich brown curls, drove proudly through the crossroads village that was Napa, in a surrey canopied and fringed in pale brown.

Leaning their elbows on the fence, the sunshine streaming down on them, and a few untimely buttercups at the fence posts scenting the still warm air, Cassy and Dan looked down at the farm.

"It seems so queer, Dan, that you aren't coming home with me for lunch, chicken and pumpkin pie, and then afterward to show Margaret the funny paper, and take a walk—or drive somewhere."

"I'd like it!" he said a little hoarsely.

"I'd like it, too. My God," Cassy said, covering her face with her hands, "how I'd like it!"

"Don't," he said.

"What fools we are, Dan!"

"I am. Not you!"

"Both of us. Talk about the pitfalls of marriage," she mused aloud. "They ought to warn girls and boys of the pitfalls of divorce!

"I'm going to do this with all my heart," she presently began again, "and you must, too, Dan. I'm going to give the children the happiest, the most successful childhood any children ever had, and you must make Dulce happy—there's no use in half measures. We've made a terrible mistake, and we've got to pay for it, and that's all there is to it!"

"Sure, I'm going to work like—like hell to make her happy!" Dan agreed gruffly.

They both laughed shakily.

"This is the beloved situation of the novels and the poems," Cassy said, smiling at him. "The last walk of the lovers—their last talk together."

Suddenly her face twisted from the smile into tears; she mounted the fence, one gauntleted hand grasping the high gatepost, sprang down on the other side, and began to walk rapidly toward Dan's car, parked on the back road behind the house.

Dan, following her, knew from the carriage of her shoulders that she was crying. She turned at the car, and her face was wet with tears. But she was smiling.

"Kiss me, my darling, and good-bye."

"Cassy, I don't think I can do it!"

"Good-bye, good-bye, my only sweetheart!" she whispered in his arms. "Ah, Dan, remember that I'll always be loving you —that I'll always thank God that we had each other, had those marvelous years together, when we were young and alone and poor!"

"It's killing me!" he muttered, his face buried in her neck.

"No, no, no, Dan, it's right. Good-bye, my dearest!"

"My wife!" he said.

There was one more kiss, wet cheeks touching, and then Cassy jerked herself away, and Dan got in the car. The engine started, he did not look out as the wheels began to move on the rough old dirt road.

Cassy stood quite still, watching him out of sight. Sunshine flashed on the black, brightly enameled body of the car as it went in and out through the trees; then it was just one more beetle among all the other black beetles on the highway.

She walked slowly down to the house, alone.

Chapter XXV

Welcomed to La Lomita royally, with a late luncheon served especially for his convenience, Dan found the remainder of the winter day strange and unreal. He felt dazed and weak, as if his head had had a blow.

The sudden alienation from Cassy and the children after these heart-warming weeks when Tommy, Margaret, and Cassy and he had been so close together was bewildering. He kept thinking of Margaret's lunch, her potato and creamed chicken and cooky, and of the continuation of *Osma of Oz*. He had read a great many books to Tommy, and often Tommy had slipped a hard little languid, boyish hand into his free left hand as he read. Dan had become quite adept at turning the pages of books with the thumb of the hand that held them.

His body was at La Lomita, but his mind and heart were down in the valley, in the shabby old ranch house under the pepper and willow trees.

"Well, did you have your talk with Cassy, dearest?'

It was night. Dulce was very lovely, very seductive, in her chair opposite his, under the evening lamp. A wood fire was burning, the carefully furnished room was in perfect order.

"Oh, my, yes! I told you that."

"Children make any fuss?"

"No. No, I told them that I had to go away on business, and that they might go to Carmel before I got home, and they never said a word."

"But how'd Cassy take it?"

"Perfectly, of course. She said—or I knew she realized—that we couldn't keep that up."

"I should hope not," Dulce agreed. "People are talking enough as it is. At least," she added hastily, as Dan's brow darkened, "it would be natural enough if they were!"

Dan smiled at her.

"You deserve a good long holiday, Dan, after such a strain! For it *is* a strain, a child's illness," Dulce said maternally.

Again his kindly smile was his only answer.

"I wish we could go to Honolulu, darling?"

"Oh, no, not yet, Dulce. I'll have to earn that. I'm going to get to work."

The fire crackled, the lamps shone softly in the perfumed air, Dulce curled luxuriously in her big chair.

"Seems so good to have you back! But I *have* been generous, haven't I?"

"You've been wonderful!" Dan wondered suddenly what he was doing up here on this hilltop, in this comfortable room, with this older woman, when his wife and children were fifteen miles away, missing him.

He was back in the wood again, under the oaks, with the hot Western winter sunshine pouring down upon him, and the quail drumming far off in a leafy glade, and jays flashing blue against a blue sky. And Cassy was sitting with her straight back against the trunk of a great tree, her slender legs straight out before her, on the slope carpeted with sharp dry oak leaves, her cream-colored sweater moving with the motion of her rounded breasts. Her face had grown hot with walking, and she had pulled off her gauntlets and taken off her hat; he remembered how the little moist rings of her dark hair had clung to her wet forehead.

"I do feel *this*—although I felt awfully badly about your not being here the night the Phippses came to dinner, and all that," Dulce rambled on comfortably, "but I do feel this—that this has been a fortunate thing, in a way. I mean, it has shown everyone how I feel toward Cassy, that I'm not a vampire who broke up her home, but that I'm only too willing and anxious to be friends—to stand by her! Your being there and seeing the whole thing through certainly hasn't hurt us with anyone. I mean, I think a great many women who have been misjudging me, have seen things very differently these last few weeks.

"Not that I *did* anything," Dulce went on, bunching her beautifully groomed fingertips, narrowing her eyes at them. "But I let you do it, which was even better!

"The whole thing began with letting a delicate six—or is he

seven—seven-year-old boy stand around in bitter cold, playing on the railroad cars. I can't help blaming Cassy for that. I think it was a simply crazy thing to do!"

"Well, of course, she thought he was hiking with the club."

"But she should have known, Dan. A good mother would *know*. Of course, I've only seen her once or twice in all this time, because she was in his room so much, but I must say that she impressed me—she always has impressed me, as being—well, *flighty*. Not exactly flighty, perhaps, but scatterbrained."

"She was nearly mad with terror over Tommy."

"Well, of course. But you know, Dan," Dulce said, in a happy luxury of confidence, flirting with the pages of her book, looking over at him lovingly, "I can see how Cassy got on your nerves. Remember how you used to come up here that winter, and I'd have chocolate and cinnamon toast for you, and you'd tell me how *tired* you were of it all, babies and meals and cold and sickness and coughs?"

"Well, maybe I got on her nerves, too."

"You just weren't suited to each other, that was the whole trouble."

This was the hour, he thought, quarter before eight, when Margaret suddenly went berserk and raced and tore about the warm kitchen in her woollies, hurling dolls into the air, sticking her little arms and legs into extraordinary positions, and chanting a mad jargon that had no beginning and no end.

"She's really funny—she's comic," he had said amazedly to Cassy, as all of them had laughed the tears into their eyes at her grotesque performance.

"She is. I don't know what gets into the little monkey. She stages a regular clown act for us every night, doesn't she, Tommy?"

"You're tired, aren't you, darling?" Dulce was saying.

"Little bit, maybe."

He got up, stretching, yawning, walking aimlessly about the room.

"Come here," she said. Dan went to her and knelt down by

her chair, and she drew his big arm about her. "There's just one thing I want you to promise me, Beautiful," Dulce coaxed, her eyelashes lowered, her hand busy with the lapel of his coat.

It had to come. Dan eyed her patiently.

"I want you to promise me to drop *all* connection there, for awhile, anyway," Dulce said. "I'll tell you why. I think it's wiser, in the first place, because of the looks of things. I'm perfectly willing to have the children up here any time you say, but I *do* think it's wiser not to have you go there."

"I agree with you," Dan said quietly, resolutely.

"And then there's another thing," Dulce pursued. "She's trying to get you back with those children!"

Hot anger rose within him; he showed no sign of it.

"That's nonsense, petty!"

"It's not nonsense at all. Millicent, yes, and other people, have seen it! Or, no, I won't say they've seen it, but they've thought of it as a possibility, Dan. And they know what a simpleton you are, darling," Dulce said fondly, rumpling his fair hair and putting little kisses here and there on his cheek as she talked. "They know that you don't—know—one—blessed—thing—about—women!"

"They could know that all right."

"So, darling, if you love me, and I know you do, and if you think I've been generous about all this, I'm going to ask you not to go near Cassy for awhile. I don't mean not to send them Christmas presents, of course, or anything spectacular——"

"But I did promise you that."

"I know you did, and I'm an awful silly to ask you again. But I just wanted to feel *sure,* Dan."

"You can feel sure."

"You see, we'll have the flower show, darling, and all the Christmas fuss—I mean, you've got a lot to do. And then there's the Salinas garage opening on January fourth, isn't it? You'll have to be back and forth. And about mid-January I do so want to take a little trip somewhere, perhaps not Honolulu . . ."

He knew that if they lived they would go to Honolulu in

January. While she talked his eyes were on the telephone that stood on a table at her elbow. The one thought that possessed him was that half a minute would give him Cassy's voice through that telephone. In thirty seconds he could be speaking to her.

"Listen," Dulce said, with an undercurrent of deadly earnest in her amused and loving voice. "Nobody's ever going to get you away from me! Nobody. Not ever."

"Wait until somebody tries," he said, kissing her.

Cassy took the children to Carmel on a bland February day that felt like spring. After the drowsy, cold quiet of the farm, there was something infinitely invigorating in the salty, sweet air from the ocean, and the balmy fragrance of the long line of sun-washed cliffs.

Her cottage was in a straggling little piney lane only a hundred yards away from the shore; the road to the village behind her wandered crookedly through dunes and tufts of sedgy grasses, only an occasional motor car floundered by, for the most part there was unbroken peace and silence.

The house was shingled, dormered, and rambling; Cassy, after the square rigidity of the ranch house in Napa, was charmed by its irregularities. The floors were at several levels, some of the rooms large, some tiny, a few crowded in under the roof picturesquely, with window seats from which one could watch the rolling blue Pacific.

Tommy, refusing invalid concessions, was established on a couch, Margaret rushed to and fro with shrieks of approval and excitement, and Cassy, unpacking with Inga's help, getting the usual moving-day supper of scrambled eggs, canned peaches and bakery rolls, felt a certain restful happiness begin to possess her, felt as if she had left all the heartaches and problems of life somewhere outside in the world.

All the doorways here gave upon pleasant little sandy paths edged with sea grasses and mallow, and the straggling geraniums and lupin that had survived from an old garden. Every vista ended with a level of blue water; in every silence they could hear the

gulls piping, and the even beat of the sea. Soft warm ocean airs flowed over the little domain; Margaret and Inga gathered buttercups and blue onion flower, with brown-furred long green grasses, and the wild flowers lent a note that Cassy liked to the first happy meal.

That night, when the children were wearily and happily asleep, she went down through the dipping little lane to the sea, and sat on the dunes just above the tide line, and looked out at the moonlit waters. The ocean moved mysteriously in the dark; to left and right the long lines of the shore disappeared into vague enveloping dimness. Silence held the world, and the soft lisping of the tide seemed a part of it.

Cassy tried to think of something else. But there was no other thought. There was only one thing in the world—there was nothing but Dan.

She planned what she would say if she should write to him and what he would reply. Not that she meant to write him, but the mere thought of it made her heart drum and her senses swim.

"My darling—the children have been so sweet—we are going to be so happy here. . . ."

A great sigh shook her. It would be wonderful to be free to write to Dan!

"My darling—are you missing me as much as I miss you? . . ."

The morning had started with infinite confusion; getting away from the ranch in the winter dawn had meant all sorts of responsibilities. The long drive to the city, the rest and luncheon there at a hotel, and the final hundred miles along the quiet wintry coast to Monterey, had all been diverting, interesting, but tiring, too. And now Cassy realized that she had been spending all this time with Dan, consulting him about the roads, calling his attention to the children, leaning against his shoulder as she had once loved to do, while he drove leisurely along. Everything she had done and said, all through the crowded day, had been done and said with Dan in mind, and now, resting and idle and weary, at night, she was still talking to him, still feeling him close beside her.

He would be lying here on the sand, with his fair, rumpled head close to her knee, she thought. They would be planning for to-morrow, he and she. "Let's bring our lunch out here to-morrow, Dan. I wonder if we couldn't build a little oven—a little camp grill, here on the cliff?"

How very simple life would be with Dan in it again, she mused. She would want nothing more in the world than her husband and children, and books, fires, and gardens, and occasional visits, like this one, to the seashore, and long intervals of schooling and picnics, and the farm interests of chickens and calves, swollen creeks, and grass fires.

"I'll have to put something into my life that isn't Dan," she thought ruefully. But the thought of him persisted—persisted. And walking back to the house she found herself trying to fabricate some good reason for writing him a casual note.

"Dear Dan, very stupidly, leaving in a hurry yesterday, I forgot to speak to Piper about the well. Could you go into his office and see him——"

Two objections. In the first place, there was nothing the matter with the well, and in the second, there was no reason why she should not write direct to Piper herself.

"Dan dear, will you look among your papers and see if you can find a bill for——"

Well, for what? For the new gas stove, or tuning the piano, or cleaning the stumps out of the upper eighty. They were all so patently excuses to get in touch with him!

"I'll stop thinking about him," she said aloud, getting to her feet and turning her back to the sea. But an hour later she went to sleep planning an elopement with Dan. They couldn't stand this parting, after these intimate, tremendous weeks of getting Tommy well. There must be some other way than this.

The quiet, sunshiny days, scented with pine and sea salt, began to slip by. Cassy walked six or seven blocks to market every morning, on tipsy little boardwalks over the shifting sand, housewifely hours punctuated with chats with neighbors and friends. Almost every one of the shopping women was escorted by a curly-headed

youngster or two in faded overalls: Cassy liked the atmosphere of simpleness and friendliness that was all about her. There was no formal social life in the place at this time, the little theater was closed, movies came only now and then. But there were pleasant encounters on all sides; chats in the bookshops, chats in the market, over the problems of chops or steak.

Every day had its two great moments, every minute of every day meant to her either recoiling disappointedly from one of them, or rising in trembling anticipation toward the next. Twice a day Cassy went through the swinging door of the post office and asked for mail.

Twice a day there was no letter or there were letters—and not from Dan. Cassy, turning away, would experience an almost sickening sense of revulsion. It was too terrible to think that hours—hours must pass before she could hope again for a letter from Dan.

Walking home, she would see an occasional motor car coming over the long grade from Monterey, and her heart would leap. Was it Dan's car—that one, or the next one, or the next one—was he returning to her at last?

Every time she heard a motor horn, all day long, her breath stopped short, and she waited to hear the engine stop close by in the pine trees and to hear Dan's quick step on the porch.

Her imagination could go no farther. There was a sort of spiritual collapse, a swooning of spirit, that swept over her at this point, and made any coherent thought impossible.

All day long she moved in a dream. But sometimes in the lonely nights, when the stars shone down silently upon the vast, solitary stretch of the sea, she lay wakeful hour after hour, and her pillow, when she slept, was wet with tears.

She began to feel conscious of nervousness, a sort of vague fear lying behind and underneath all other moods. Her heart would beat rapidly when she was quietly reading at night; an unexpected sound would make her start and shudder, apprehensive eyes moving to the window, or glancing uneasily over her shoulder.

Chapter XXVI

On a certain March morning the Carmel colony awakened in a world of fog. There had been other fogs there; there were often heavy fogs over the town, great walls of soft warm mist that poured in from the wide face of the ocean and smothered the trees, the dunes, and the houses and rolled on toward the brown hills to clutch them in milky fingers for days at a time.

Fog was a matter for daily conversation in the seaside village.

"Wasn't the fog dense this morning?" the shopping women said in the markets. "Wasn't that an awful fog that came up last night? My sister was afraid to drive back to Pacific Grove —there simply wasn't any road!"

These were the everyday fogs. But this March fog was memorable; the village would date weather conditions for some time from "the day of the terrible fog."

When Cassy looked out of her bedroom window at half-past seven that morning there was no sea and there was no world. Close to the cottage some shrubs, fuchsia and geranium bushes, showed vague and colorless against the soft wall of undulating mist; beyond that was nothing. No fences, no dipping sandy roadway, no scattered tufts of sedge and mallow; nothing but fog.

Lights were lighted over the breakfast table; a wood fire crackled.

"It scares me," Inga said, round eyed, coming in with the coffee.

"Yes, it does me a little, too. I've never in my life seen such a fog!"

The women stood at windows, looking at it helplessly. White, and whiter, and more whiteness billowing against the white. Toward the west they could hear some steamer making her way down the coast with muffled hoarse cries floating fearfully into the enveloping mists.

Cassy, in spite of a vague exhilaration, felt oddly uneasy.

"When a thing's as bad as this, you want it to get worse, don't you, Mother?" Tommy asked enthusiastically.

A scene from the Metro-*Goldwyn*-Mayer All-Talking Picture "Passion Flower," a William de Mille Production.

She laughed, stooping to kiss the top of his dark head.

"You do feel rather that way, Tom."

"Are we going to market?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. But I wouldn't dare drive . . ."

It gave one an odd sense of isolation, this fog. The house was like a thing detached, floating in it. It muffled the place in a strange silence; no gulls were crying this morning, and the occasional moan of the foghorns had a helpless, frightened sound. From San Carlos Mission, a quarter of a mile away, the bells were sending queer, clanging notes into the silenced world; perhaps it was only a funeral, but it sounded like something momentous, menacing.

In the village no motors were stirring. Women were walking cautiously along the wooden sidewalks, laughing excitedly when they loomed up against each other, in the fog.

"Isn't this un*canny?*"

"Well, it's actually *dangerous!*"

"They say the busses aren't running!"

"You look almost as if you were scared, Mrs. Wallace," Mrs. Hooper said smiling.

"Well—" Cassy shook herself, actually and mentally, managed an answering smile—"well, I am!" she confessed. "I don't know why. There's something creepy about it—something that gets on my nerves." Tears stood suddenly in her eyes. "It makes me feel as if—something were going to happen."

"It's perfectly safe," the other woman said sympathetically and kindly.

"Oh, I know it! But—I don't know—alone there with Inga and the children, there seems to be something—terrifying . . ."

"Well, why not come over to my house for lunch and the afternoon, Mrs. Wallace?" the other woman said kindly. "Helen and the boys are there."

"Oh, no, I'm all right!" Cassy assured her with a nervous laugh. "It'll probably lift," she said, looking about the globe of creamy whiteness that contained them. Nothing of all the world was visible except the plank walk under their feet.

"Well, will you come over this afternoon if it doesn't?"

"I will. And so many thanks."

She engineered the children, now dividing a box of fig cookies with some casual acquaintances, carefully home. But even on the way there a very definite uneasiness began to take possession of her again, and once in the house she found herself shaking with terror.

Of what? Of what? Surely not of this fog, for as a native born San Franciscan she had been accustomed to lesser or greater fogs a hundred mornings a year all her life long. Surely not of solitude; Inga was singing to herself as she worked in the kitchen, in a full, heartening flood of electric light, and Tom and Margaret were playing safely in the back yard—out of sight, but Cassy could occasionally hear their voices and those of the other children. They often played out there for whole busy mornings, climbing rafters, lying like cougars on roofs, filling bottles, wheeling carts and wheelbarrows and coasters to and fro.

This morning she was continually rushing out, in a spasm of anxiety, to see what they were doing.

"And you mustn't go down to the beach without asking me, Tom."

"I know, Mother. Mother, can we have raisins?"

"All you want. Be sure the girls get some. Only don't go away, darling."

And Cassy would go back to the house as uneasy as ever.

She determined to put her desk in order, settled down resolutely to empty pigeonholes and assort letters. She carried her inkwell to the little washstand in the passage and set it to soak. And all the time the fog peered into the room like a living creature, quietly awaiting its hour, and all the time her heart shook her body with its quickening beat, and her throat felt thick and dry.

"Maybe I have a fever!" Cassy thought, putting her palms to her hot cheeks.

At eleven o'clock the telephone rang; Cassy's hand shook as

she took down the receiver. It was Mac, talking from San Francisco, friendly and casual.

"You sound queer, Cassy. What's up?"

Her trill of reassuring laughter died away into a somewhat uncertain voice.

"Nothing. Only—we have the most ghastly fog down here this morning. The whole place is in a winding sheet!"

"We've got a heavy fog here, too."

"Oh, have you?" For some obscure reason she was glad of it.

"How about my coming down to-night for dinner?"

"Oh, Mac, you'd look like a conquering army!"

"Then I'll come. I'll get there 'round seven."

"We'll kill the fatted calf! Or, no, I'll have your curry, your own special curry!"

"Need any books?"

"Mac, you're saving my life. You sound so alive and normal and human!"

"Cassy," he said seriously, "stop being so nice to me. You're putting all kinds of ideas into my head!"

And this time her laugh was really gay, and her farewell had its usual cheerful note as she ended the conversation.

But immediately afterward chill and fright began to seize her again. She looked nervously about her, wishing, in sudden unreasonable panic, that she had asked Mac to come at once—immediately, without an instant's delay. Until the reassuring sunlight shone again and the world emerged from this maddening and baffling obscurity she needed human companionship—she needed to be reminded that this was only a trifling incident of the weather, not the end of all things mortal.

The fire had burned low, but the sitting room was pleasantly warm, and over Cassy's desk burned her green student light. All about her was the homelike disorder of a country house, scattered books, piano strewn with music, deep chairs, cushioned couches, and jars and bowls filled with flowers from the spangled cliff just outside the door.

The clock sounded the half hour, and Cassy jumped and uttered a faint scream.

"This is *ridiculous,*" she said aloud, as the silence settled down once more.

"Cassy——" a deep voice said close behind her. Cassy turned with an inarticulate gasp and half rose, her terrified eyes on the doorway, her hand pressed tightly against her heart.

"Oh, what is it—what is it?" she whispered, fainting. And immediately she caught her breath with an apologetic, agitated laugh. Dulce was standing in the doorway, looking at her steadily, without a smile.

Stern, accusing, hostile, there was nothing particularly reassuring in her aspect. Cassy, rallying her scattered forces as best she might, faltered forth an amazed apology.

"Dulce—you frightened me so! I've been as nervous as a witch anyway this morning—this awful fog . . ."

She moved to wheel a basket chair toward the fire.

"Sit down," she said confusedly. "Does it seem cold to you in here? Sit down, Dulce. Here—let me take them."

Dulce, still without speaking or moving her accusing, still regard from Cassy's face, surrendered her bag and gloves and sat down in the offered chair, throwing off her furs as she did so.

Cassy took the opposite chair, sensing that they two were at grips at last. Both women were pale and breathing a little constrainedly; their eyes were locked.

"Did you—you didn't drive down all the way—no, of course you couldn't!" Cassy babbled inconsequentially.

"You don't care, do you?" the other asked measuredly. Her scornful manner helped to restore Cassy's shattered self-control. She swallowed, and raised her head proudly, answering with a composure equal to Dulce's own strange composure:

"Perhaps I don't."

"Well, then," Dulce said, in the same cold, suspicious manner, "we can talk."

Cassy merely regarded her expectantly, lips closed, nostrils moving with her quickened deep breathing.

"Cassy," Dulce began without preamble, "where's Dan?"

Her voice shook violently on his name. She immediately, with an obvious effort, straightened herself and regained her calm.

Cassy felt herself beginning to tremble again; there was something frightful in the sight of this quiet woman in a dark blue suit and brown furs, with a blue hat pulled down over her fair hair.

"How should I know where Dan is?"

Dulce eyed her dispassionately, as if she were appraising an interesting stranger.

"I didn't ask you what you knew, did I?" she demanded in a tone held to the level of cold iron. "I asked you where Dan was."

"I don't know," Cassy answered bluntly, the angry color rising in her face.

"You do know," Dulce countered quietly. The other woman looked at her, making no reply. "And you're going to tell me," Dulce added.

A sudden hysterical sense of the absurdity of the scene, of one man's two wives, young and good-looking women, shut into this globe of fog, hating each other, glaring at each other, dramatizing the thing, upset Cassy's gravity and helped her to speak naturally and quickly.

"I give you my word of honor, Dulce, I've neither seen him nor heard from him since we left Napa five weeks ago!"

Dulce looked at her keenly, with suspicion in her narrowed eyes and a sneer on her lips. Then she said haughtily:

"I don't believe you!"

But immediately the pretence failed her; her lips trembled. Suddenly groping for a handkerchief she burst into tears.

"You *do* believe me," Cassy said gravely.

"Well, then, I don't know where he is!" Dulce sobbed desperately.

"No, truly—I haven't seen or heard of him since we came," Cassy presently repeated, watching her unmoved.

"I came down to Del Monte last night," Dulce said in a pite-

ous tone. "I've not slept a wink. I——" She faltered into tears again. "I was sure he was here!" she said.

"This is terrible," Cassy said in a clear, hard tone. She got up and walked to the window.

Dulce looked after her a little timidly. Cassy stood looking blindly out into the pulsating world of fog.

"What is?" Dulce then asked feebly.

"Why, Dan—you—me," Cassy explained impatiently, in a tone of bitter protest. "It's *terrible,*" she said.

"It's terrible to love anyone as I love Dan," Dulce agreed in a tear-shaken, muffled voice.

Cassy, at the window, answered only with a brief and mirthless laugh.

"He's all I have," Dulce added pathetically.

There was a short silence. Then Cassy came back to the fireplace and sat down.

"It seems unfortunate," she began dryly, "that we cannot seem to get—this—thing—settled."

There were pauses between the words, and afterward a long pause.

"We could get it settled," Dulce said eagerly. "We *could* get it settled, if Dan once could believe—if he once could see that you don't care any more!"

She looked entreatingly at Cassy, and Cassy looked back at her with eyes widening delicately in surprise.

"My dear Dulce!" she said then, in a tone of incredulity and mild protest. Suddenly she put her brown hand tightly over her eyes, relaxing in her chair, with her head flung against its high rising back. "This is funny," Cassy murmured.

"You don't mean," Dulce questioned in a thickening voice, "that you still *do* care, Cassy?"

Cassy took down her hand and looked almost mirthfully—but it was a bitter sort of mirth—at the other woman.

"Well, my dear," she began patiently, "isn't that—*it?*"

Dulce's fair face had flushed in red blotches.

"But—but you and he were divorced," she stammered stubbornly.

"It doesn't—seem to make much difference, does it?"

"It *ought* to!" Dulce protested, shocked.

"I've never changed," Cassy observed dispassionately.

To this Dulce for some time could find nothing to say. Suddenly she burst out passionately:

"So you are going to take him away from me?"

"Not necessarily," Cassy answered. "That wouldn't solve anything."

"Nothing would solve anything!" Dulce said, beginning to weep again. "But all I know is that I love Dan—I've never loved anyone else! There are plenty of other men in the world, just as smart, just as attractive——"

She paused, wiping her eyes, her voice sinking off into a tearful silence.

"But they are not—Dan," Cassy observed simply.

"Ever since Tommy's accident he's been changed," the visitor presently said. "Nothing I've done has cheered him up—I knew it, I knew that he was unhappy! But I never guessed the reason until a few days ago. Then he told me that he was going away—he's taken an agency in Sydney."

"Australia!"

"Australia. And he's going there!"

Suddenly Dulce got up from her seat and came with a swift rush to Cassy's side, falling to her knees, clasping the other younger woman's hands.

"Give him back to me!" she whispered, tears running down her cheeks. "Cassy, you can do it! You had him and you gave him up. Don't break my heart—don't let him leave me all alone."

"Get up, Dulce!" Cassy said, ashamed and embarrassed. "Please don't do that—please get up."

"I tell you I'll go on my knees to you all my life. I'll be the most wonderful friend you ever had, Cassy. It's killing me."

"*Please*——" Cassy repeated.

"Cassy, you had him, and you and he decided to separate! But

I've never looked at another man since I've had Dan—I worship him, everyone knows that! If it's to punish me for marrying him," Dulce sobbed, clinging tight to Cassy's hands, dragging at them so that Cassy could not turn away, "then don't—don't make us all unhappy just for revenge! I can't help loving him——"

Her voice died out in a wail; she looked with streaming eyes at Cassy's face.

Suddenly Cassy tightened her own hands on the arms that were pinioning her and, leaning toward Dulce, said fiercely:

"You can't help loving him! Then why do you think *I* can?"

The other woman drew back, a little frightened; Cassy seemed to menace her as she bent forward.

"Do you think I'm proud of myself—still wanting him?" Cassy demanded. "Do you think I'd not forget him—put him out of my life if I *could?* Do you think it's any happiness to me to go on aching for him—longing for him—thinking about him all day and all night?

"I *know* there are other men finer than Dan, smarter and richer and better," she went on in a dry, wild rush. "Does *that* make any difference? Why, I'd rather see him walk in there at that door, with his old brown cap on, and his homespun suit——"

Her voice broke. She leaned proudly back in her chair, unashamed of her suddenly wet eyes.

"I don't know why I love him," she began again in a gentler tone. "I don't know why he seems different from everyone else in the world. I don't know why I'd rather have trouble with Dan than good times with anyone else, or why it's heaven to me to pack up a picnic lunch and go up on the hills with him, and—well, just a picnic, if it's anyone else! My life is divided into two parts," Cassy went on, "the times that Dan is in it—when *everything* is right, everything is significant—and the times that just—don't count. When I'm not with him I'm thinking about him. The way he drinks his coffee, the way his hand looks when he lights a cigarette, the way he comes to a bathroom door with his head all dripping and a towel in his hands—how do *I* know what all that means to me?

"I never gave him up, in my heart," she said after a pause in which Dulce cried quietly, her face hidden. "I was angry—I was sick with jealousy and anger, and I quarreled with him. But quarrels don't mean that you've stopped loving a person!

"I thought he'd come back, and that we'd make it up as we always had—I waited for him to come back. He would have, if it hadn't been for you, Dulce. I'm not blaming you. But a man always would come back to his own wife if it weren't for the other woman.

"He didn't come back, and I had to learn to live without him. It almost killed me for awhile.

"I wrote Dan a terrible letter imploring him to come home. But you had him then. I'm not blaming you; it seems to be fair play nowadays to get a man's wife away or a woman's husband away if you can. More blame to the wife or husband who can't hold them!

"But now *you* can't hold him, and everything's all mixed up again."

"It was Tommy's accident," Dulce said resentfully.

"I suppose that had something to do with it. God knows that it started it all up again in my heart," Cassy confessed after a pause. "I had to give him up all over again—and he seemed to belong to the children and me!"

"He can't be true to anyone!" Dulce exclaimed bitterly.

"I don't know that it matters." Cassy's tone was weary; she shrugged faintly. "He's the most wonderful company, the most lovable person who ever lived." Her musing voice stopped.

"Doesn't matter whether a person is faithful or not?" Dulce echoed shocked. "Well, I think it matters—it matters to *me*."

"It doesn't seem to," Cassy observed dryly.

The other woman was silent for a moment, biting her lip.

"No, it doesn't make any difference, if it's—Dan," she admitted. "But, now, Cassy," she went on forlornly, "what are we going to do?"

"Going to do?"

"Yes. What's—what's going to happen next?"

Cassy could manage a laugh.

"Why—nothing," she said.

"But—you mean, let him go?" Dulce demanded blankly.

Cassy laughed again.

"What else can you do?"

"But that way," Dulce said stubbornly, *"nobody's* happy! You're not, I'm not, and he won't be. You know Dan!"

"No, nobody'll be happy," Cassy conceded.

Dulce looked at her blankly for a full minute, her tear-stained face puzzled.

"You hate me, don't you?" she asked sullenly.

"No, I don't hate you," Cassy answered after a moment's thought.

"Well, then, you hate him!"

"I don't see," Cassy submitted, "I don't see why there should be any hate in it."

"Ah, well," Dulce said, miserable and dissatisfied, "perhaps you aren't proud! But, unfortunately, I am."

"You can't even anger me saying that, Dulce," Cassy observed meditatively.

"And you think it's fair that you should be miserable, and I should be miserable, and Dan should go scot-free and perhaps find some other woman in Australia?"

"No, I don't think it's fair. Life isn't—necessarily—fair, is it?"

There was a silence, during which Dulce's reddened eyes studied Cassy's face wistfully.

"But surely there's some happy way out?" she asked timidly after awhile.

Cassy shrugged, got up restlessly, and paced the room. She stopped by the window and stood looking out. The garden billowed with white; the leaves of such plants as were visible, close to the house, were beaded with tiny pearls of warm moisture.

Unnatural, frightening, this persistent bombardment by the fog. The cottage was afloat on a chartless sea of it, drifting farther and farther away from a sunshiny world of normal tones and

voices, laughter and school children and books and peaceful household ways.

Dulce came over to Cassy's side, her face transfigured with sudden passion.

"If I thought that you were fooling me—that Dan was down here—that the reason you're so—so philosophical—" she began trembling—"is because you know you've—won, I'd fight you—I'd fight you—I would, Cassy! I'd get the finest lawyer in this state——"

"Oh, don't be a fool, Dulce!" Cassy said wearily, as the furious voice broke.

"This—this horrible fog makes me nervous!" Dulce muttered apologetically and gloomily, looking out.

Tommy suddenly appeared under the window between drooping cosmos bushes, carrying a telegram. He presently came in to stand, manly and straight, beside his mother's chair, eying Dulce interestedly. Cassy opened the flimsy envelope.

"It's probably from Mother," Cassy had explained, walking to her chair. "She was coming down to-morrow; she hates the telephone, she never telephones."

She tore open the yellow envelope; it fell to the floor. Cassy felt the room rock; her mouth was dry and her hands cold. She tried desperately for calm—she must show nothing. This was her own sitting room, Dulce was here, Tommy had thrown a crumpled telegram envelope into the fire, and the lazy gray ashes were smoking about it. The fog—the fog—the fog was outside the windows. In the silence the little mantel clock began to strike a swift twelve.

"Leaving for long trip to-morrow, must see you to-day at noon," the telegram said. It was signed "Dan."

From far spaces Cassy could dimly hear Dulce asking:

"Your mother is coming down?"

And thickly and vaguely she heard herself answer:

"Yes—she'll be here—at noon."

She crumpled the telegram as she had crumpled the envelope and leaned forward to fling it on the now aroused flame.

"You're at Del Monte?" she asked.

"No, I'm on my way home, I drove myself," Dulce answered. "My car is in your lane, here. I had a late breakfast," she said restlessly, unhappily, "and I thought I'd lunch somewhere, driving up."

"Oh, if he only sees her car—if only he recognizes it!" Cassy prayed.

"I'm putting you out?" Dulce asked, frowning faintly, looking in the direction of the opened dining-room doors. "The children have an early lunch?"

"We have lunch at half-past twelve and dinner at half-past six," Margaret, lying on the floor and alternately elevating a small right leg and a small left leg in a way that exposed trim little bloomers and round bare knees, answered gayly.

"But unfortunately I made an engagement for twelve—with a neighbor—club work——" Cassy stammered, trembling.

"But I have to talk more to you, Cassy," Dulce said, alarmed. "We—we haven't settled anything. And I wanted to ask you, if you hear from him before he sails, to let me know. There's something I have to talk about with him. I *have* to see him again! I'll rush on board the steamer and make a scene——"

"No, you won't!" Cassy said, unstirred, as she paused threateningly. Dulce subsided, and there was a minute of silence.

And in this moment the whole thing seemed to Cassy like a nightmare; a terrible dream of fog and fright, with the children going through their usual before-lunch absurdities, Dulce sitting there, red eyed and sulky and shaken in her blue suit, and Dan's telegram turned to ashes in the fire.

"Can I wait and see you this afternoon?" Dulce asked.

"It seems to me there is nothing to say," Cassy said.

"I *cannot* go back to La Lomita and eat my heart out!" Dulce began suddenly, with a burst of tears. "I can't do it! There's nothing for me to live for."

Cassy stood, awkward, determined, in the attitude of the dismissing hostess. The children had gone back to the yard again.

"I'll tell you what, Dulce. I'll write—I'll come to Napa."

"But he'll be gone! Don't you understand, Cassy? He'll be gone!"

"But even if he is, what can we do?"

Dulce stood stubbornly pushing one fair, full hand to and fro on the curve of an old walnut chair back.

"We mustn't let him go," she persisted miserably.

"Oh, that's nonsense!" Cassy said. "It's the only thing that can save him—pull him out——" She hesitated.

"Pull him out of *what?*" the other woman asked, hurt and suspicious. "Save him from *what?*"

"From the feeling that he's made a terrible wreck of things—that we all have."

"But we haven't!" Dulce insisted. "What's been wrecked? If you mean your divorce, why, it happens every day!"

"I know it does. Dulce," Cassy interrupted herself desperately. "I have to go now. I have a—an engagement. I'll come up to Napa. . . ." She urged the other woman toward the door.

"Do you *want* me to go?" Dulce demanded bluntly.

"Well—since I have to go myself . . ."

Dulce, a solidly built, handsome figure, in her blue suit and hat, with the brown furs setting off her sweep of fair hair, eyed her hostess skeptically.

"You want me to go!" she exclaimed with conviction.

Cassy managed an unconvincing laugh.

"No, I don't want you to go! But—but we ought to talk about these things——"

"After Dan is gone, I suppose?"

"Well, he's *going,* isn't he?"

"You expect him here this morning, don't you?" Dulce suddenly asked shrewdly. "That's what the trouble is, isn't it?"

Cassy faced her, smiling. But the color had faded in her brown cheeks.

"Nonsense!" she said.

"You know where he is, don't you?"

"I give you my word I don't!"

"If I thought you did——" Dulce said, breathing hard.

They stood like two jungle animals, motionless, watching each other. And in the dead silence, shut in the pleasant, fogbound room, with the distant faint rush of the invisible sea accentuating the strange dreamy stillness of the day, Cassy heard the sound of an approaching motor.

Her heart rose on a wild, frightened prayer. It was unthinkable that this could be Dan! The sound was stronger—it was going away—it was coming nearer again—it stopped. It stopped at the garden gate that was smothered and lost in the creamy bank of the fog.

"Who's that?" Dulce asked.

"I don't know," Cassy said, swallowing with a dry throat.

"It stopped here."

"It might be my mother."

Oh, have it Mother—have it Mother—her frightened prayers jumbled together.

The garden gate clicked, steps sounded on the porch, and somebody turned the knob of the porch door behind Dulce. Dulce wheeled; Cassy's eyes were fixed upon the figure of a man blocked suddenly against the foggy garden beyond the opened doorway. It was Dan.

Chapter XXVII

He stood there, looking a little haggard, a little pale, in his familiar brown tweeds. His fair head drooped forward, he stared at the two women amazedly, with his own faint, puzzled frown. Cassy's heart went toward him as the heart of a mother goes toward a bewildered child. She put out a quick brown hand and supported herself by the back of a chair.

Silence held them all for the space of endless seconds. Dulce was the first to break it.

"I *thought* so!" she said with a little scornful laugh. She put down the gloves and bag that Cassy, in her fever to hurry Dulce's departure, had handed her and flung herself into a chair again, staring with bright, triumphant, furious eyes, first at Cassy and then at Dan. "I knew you were seeing each other," she said, breathing swiftly. "I *knew* all that talk about resignation and philosophy meant that Dan was coming here, all the time."

"Hello, Dulce," Dan said in a tired tone, not understanding her. "I didn't know that you were here."

"Oh, believe me, I know *that,*" Dulce assured him quickly.

"Sit down, Dan," Cassy said.

He came to her, took her hand. Their eyes looked unsmilingly into each other's.

"You see, I'm going away, Cass," Dan explained. "And I wanted to say good-bye to you and the kids."

"Don't put this all on for me!" Dulce entreated them lightly.

Cassy turned serious eyes toward her.

"We're not putting anything on," she answered in mild impatience. "I've not seen Dan since I left Napa. I didn't know until to-day that he was going away."

"Of course I believe *that,*" Dulce assured her. And she laughed affectedly, and ended on a great sigh, as if bored by their stubbornness.

"Perhaps I shouldn't have tried this," Dan said, troubled, with a glance for Dulce. "I didn't mean to let you in for anything."

"Oh, that's all right," Cassy assured him. "We must all be crazy, talking this way!" she thought.

"Dear me, you make me feel in the way!" Dulce said, trembling.

Cassy looked at her apathetically for a few seconds, as if she took no cognizance of what she saw. She looked back at Dan.

"I'll call the children."

"Perhaps you and Cassy don't mind my knowing where you're going?" Dulce asked.

"I don't know," Cassy answered.

"I suppose not," Dulce responded politely.

"There's no reason why you shouldn't know," Dan broke in abruptly. "I'm sailing to-morrow at eleven on the *Regilus.*"

"You were going without telling me?" Dulce faltered, suddenly close to tears.

"You knew I was going—somewhere."

"Dan," Dulce stammered, her eyes brimming, "what have I done?"

The sudden appeal embarrassed him. Cassy saw his quick, shamed look come to her. He moved his eyes to stare into space, made no reply.

"Well . . ." Cassy said, wondering if this were all a dream. She went to the porch door, opened it upon a garden pulsing softly and mysteriously with fog. "Tommy!" she called. "Margaret!"

Their small feet came running, unseen in the mist, but close. Tommy's sturdy voice shouted, "All right, Mom!"

They burst into the room, stopped short, checked by the sight of visitors. Then Tommy, with a shout, made a rush for Dan, and he was laughing in his father's arms. Dan stooped his tall fair head to the child's dark one.

A lean, brown boy, with Cassy's blue eyes and mop of black hair. He had been playing, he was flushed and disheveled, he radiated life and vigor and high spirits, and the grip of his thin little arms was like a vise.

"Dad, where've you been? We haven't had any fun without you! Why didn't you come down here with us?"

"He's all right again, isn't he?" Dan asked, handling the broad, thin little shoulders. "He looks fine."

"Oh, he's made over," Cassy said.

"Look here, Son," said Dan. "I have to go away on a ship. I'll write you." He cleared his throat. "I'll send you things," he promised. "I came to say good-bye."

Tommy's alarmed eyes were on his mother.

"Aren't we going, Mom?"

"Not now, no."

"But after, huh?"

"Perhaps so."

"A boy I knew's father took him to China, Dad," Tommy suggested hopefully.

"I'll take you on a trip some day, Tom."

Margaret, tawny and straight, in a dark blue frock that extended to a point somewhat above her round, fair little knees only, leaving a long stretch of firm, rounded leg before the blue socks and white buckskin slippers began, now extended a woolly bear unsmilingly to her father.

"Kiss Tubby," she commanded.

"Mother cries when you're not here," Tommy announced abruptly.

"You must both kiss Dad and go out to Inga and have your lunches," Cassy, who was very pale under her brown skin, directed them.

"Isn't Dad going to stay for lunch?" Tom asked, stupefied.

"Maybe. But do as Mother asks you now, Tom."

"Si' down an' lemme get in your lap, Dad," Margaret was commanding him. Proud and serious, with her tangle of bright hair framing her rosy little imperious face, she tugged willfully on his hand. "I want you to tell me 'bout the goat that nobody couldn't never tame!" she said.

Dan looked down at her abstractedly, slightly shaking his head,

smiling back into her despotic little face and resisting the hands that tried to force him into a seat.

"After awhile I will," he promised.

"After lunch?"

"After lunch."

She put up both soft little arms, tipping her head back so that the mane of pure gold fell in a straight sweep on her shoulders, strangling her father with her adoring embrace, pressing meaningless, hard baby kisses on his face.

"Don't go 'way, Daddy!"

"I won't," Dan said desperately, his face whitening.

"Keep Daddy here," Margaret said, departing.

"We can come back after lunch, Mother?"

"Yes, dear—anything. But go out to Inga now."

She saw them to the dining-room door, closed it behind them. Coming back into the room she took her fireplace chair. Dan was at the window, looking out between frilled transparent curtains into the fog; Dulce was watching them both with hard, bright eyes.

"I don't say that's easy, I know you love them," Dulce began in a slightly apologetic, resentful tone. "But what I say is—is it my fault that things have got all mixed up this way?"

"No, it's not your fault," Cassy conceded indifferently, after a moment of silence. Dan, his back to the room, neither moved nor spoke.

"The situation is," Dulce rushed on, encouraged, "that I love Dan—I always have. Even before poor Lou died, I knew it! Dan came to me several years ago, unhappy and lonely, misunderstood at home——"

Cassy had laid her arms along the table that stood by her chair; her narrowed eyes were on the fire.

"We all know what happened," she reminded Dulce briefly.

"Yes, of course. But you remember telling me how misunderstood you were, Dan, how lonely you were?"

Dan had turned. He was facing the room, his head slightly low-

ered, his face grim and white. He had thrust his hands into his coat pockets.

"Perfectly," he said.

"You and Cassy decided to get a divorce," Dulce continued, appealing with her vivid glance first to one and then the other. "I had nothing to do with *that!* It was your own affair. And then, when you had come to me and *begged* me to marry you, and when we were married, Cassy wrote you, asking you to come back, for the sake of the children."

Cassy's breath fluctuated quickly; her blue eyes moved to Dan. He was looking with a sort of detached curiosity at Dulce.

"You remember that, Dan?"

"Yep," he answered, without any change of expression, his look still riveted to hers.

"You could have gone back to her then, if you wanted to, Dan, you could have gotten another divorce! Why didn't you? It wasn't my fault, surely, that you didn't?"

Her brimming eyes were turned to him. Dan made no answer.

"How can you be so unjust to me when I love you so?" Dulce said, breaking. "What have I done? What *haven't* I done? I've always loved you madly, desperately. I always will! My life had been so lonely, Dan, before you came, and I've been so happy since. I've been in a Fool's Paradise. I've loved La Lomita, and you and me going about there, talking about the horses, having our breakfasts and dinners together! I've been so proud——

"Dan, you can't ask me to go back there now, alone, and have them all laughing at me, all saying that when I got you I couldn't hold you! I can't do it. It's breaking my heart!"

"My God," Dan said, in a measured voice that was new to Cassy, "do you think I'm *enjoying* it? Do you think I planned this little party?"

"No, but why can't you just come back simply and let things go along as they were?" Dulce pleaded, turning to him eagerly, glad to have drawn fire from him, at least. "I don't say it's easy, Dan. I know how—how much Tom came to mean to you while he

was so ill. But why should we *all* be unhappy? You and I can travel, we'll have—you'll lend us the children, Cassy? Why, my lawyer," she told them, with a slight change of tone, with a hint of something new in her voice, "said that you could claim the children some of the time, anyway."

Red rose in Cassy's brown cheeks. She did not move her steady blue gaze from Dulce's face.

"But we'd never have to come to that!" Dulce went on. "Why —why can't we arrange it all simply, reasonably, like sensible human beings?"

She saw no yielding in Dan's face, no brightening in Cassy's. Her tone grew sharper and more shrill.

"Now, I tell you, Dan, if you go away, I'll go too! I *will*. I won't have you off in some strange place—Australia or Buenos Aires, waiting for Cassy——

"Why, don't you suppose I know that that's what you're going to do? Try to get a divorce and be remarried? Do you suppose I'm such a fool as not to know that that's all planned?"

Cassy said, in a moment of silence, when the last echoes of Dulce's angry words rang in the queer stillness of the little country room:

"I think you'd better go, Dan."

"Yes," he said quickly, nervously, "I'll go."

"Is it to Australia, Dan?"

"Yes. I've got an agency—it may not amount to much. Anyway, it doesn't matter."

Dulce was on her feet, too, looking at them both, breathing fast, the color showing in patches on her fair skin.

"I'll—I'll have you followed!" she said desperately.

"What good would that do?" Cassy asked her coldly.

Dulce burst into despairing tears.

"You—you have it all fixed up between you!" she said.

"Don't be a fool!" Dan said, without venom.

"To me," Cassy said mildly, "to me his going seems the sensible thing to do. We're all wrought up about it, we're not normal. A change—Dan's being away——"

"But what have I done?" Dulce demanded pathetically. "What have I done to have Dan mad at *me?*"

"Well," Cassy countered with a rueful smile, "what did *I* do, four years ago?"

Dan came over to her, a big, squarely built figure in a tweed suit. And she saw the troubled, appealing boy's smile in his eyes. He held out his big hand.

"We have balled this all up," he said. "I had no idea of coming down here to make a scene. I told Dulce last week that I had to get away for awhile—I might have known she'd realize I wouldn't go without seeing you. It'll all straighten out, somehow. But I wish to God—" Dan paused—"I wish to God I wasn't such a fool!" he said slowly.

"We're all fools," Cassy told him. She looked up smilingly into his face. "Good-bye, Dan," she said. "Good luck!"

Dan went to the other woman and held out his hand in the same way, but Dulce pushed him petulantly aside.

"You mean you're actually going?"

"I've got to go."

"Then," Dulce flung out at him spitefully, "you might as well go the whole way! Go to Australia, and I'll sue for divorce, I'll sue on the grounds of alienation of affections—and I never want to see either of your faces again! You've ruined my life as you ruined hers, and if Cassy wants you now, after what you've done to her, she can have you! For four years I've been paying your expenses, I've been petting you and spoiling you—now she can take you back, when I'm tired of you and you're tired of me! But believe me, I'll broadcast this whole thing the length and breadth of the nation! It'll be a famous case—the second wife suing the first for alienation of affections! I can do it. Roger Fargo told me so in San Francisco yesterday! As for me," Dulce went on, choking with angry laughter and unwelcome tears, "I think the whole thing is a *joke!* I've finished my crying, you can be sure of that—I'm *done*. The laugh is going to be on you now, Dan. I can have you shadowed—I can get witnesses! I was a fool—oh, yes, any woman's a fool when she falls in love with a man eight years

younger than she is, but I'll be the shadow that keeps you and Cassy separated, just as she's come between you and me. You two think it's so easy to fool me, to pull the wool over my eyes——"

A second of throbbing silence. Nobody moved. Then Dulce, high and breathless and hysterical again.

"Just remember this. I'm not going to drive off the bank in the fog going home, I'm not going to commit suicide. I'm going to *wait*. I'll wait for you to come back, Dan, to-night or to-morrow. And if you don't come, believe me, the gossips up home will have something to talk about! Neither one of you will ever show your faces there again!"

Her eyes looked very dark in a chalky white face. She stood staring at them, laughed abruptly.

"You don't believe in curses, do you? But I do. And here—here's something to start the new honeymoon with," she said. She fumbled in her bag, brought out a flat packet of letters tied with a red ribbon.

"There!" she said, tossing them on the table. "There are the letters Dan wrote me during that winter when he was on the ranch with you, the winter before we were married. You ought to read them aloud, I assure you they're worth it. I kept a few—I may need them. But you can have these!"

"What a horrible dream this is!" Cassy thought.

"Good-bye!" Dulce said, and laughed again.

She went to the garden door, opened it. The fog loomed creamy and thick, moving, fuming noiselessly, beyond. The leaves of the vine over the lintel were beaded with warm water.

"You will never be happy while I live—and I'm going to live," Dulce said.

Cassy and Dan stood motionless, looking through the open door. They saw her furred, sturdy figure disappear into the mist and heard the sudden buzz of a motor and the jarring of gears. The engine roared, subsided, hummed steadily, fainter and more faint, into the distance, and was gone.

There was silence for a minute. Then Dan said vaguely:

"Queer weather."

"The heaviest fog I ever remember," Cassy said.

"Dulce feels terribly," Dan began suddenly. "I don't know what we—what we can do about it."

"No. There doesn't seem to be anything to do about it."

"It's up to me," he said.

"It's up to us all," Cassy contributed, after a pause of reflection. "But she'll get over it—part of it. She'll feel better when she gets back to La Lomita, when things begin to run normally again."

"Maybe," Dan agreed doubtfully.

He stooped and clumsily picked the packet of letters from the floor. He turned it vaguely in his hands. There was an odd silence in the room, as if the air, so lately shot, shattered and echoing from Dulce's angry voice, gathered itself into wholeness and peace again.

"It was terrible to have her so angry!" Cassy said.

"She gets like that." He handed her the letters, flat and slim in their limp red ribbon. "I didn't know she was coming down here," he said. "I left home day before yesterday. A man in the service station, going through town a week or two ago, talked to me about Australia, and day before yesterday it kind of—got me, and I came down and talked to him in the city."

"You don't seem to have any trouble getting jobs *now,* Dan. Remember when it used to worry you so for fear you'd never make good?"

"I haven't made good," he muttered darkly. He stood by the table, turning the pages of a magazine, looking at it with unseeing eyes.

Cassy looked down at the letters in her hand.

"Do you suppose Dulce thought I'd read these?"

"I suppose so."

"She has curious ideas—primitive ideas," Cassy observed mildly.

"*She'd* read 'em fast enough!" Dan said. He glanced at them, flushed darkly. "I don't know what gets into a man when he goes crazy about a woman," he said awkwardly.

"I don't know what got into *us,*" Cassy amended it. "As she

stood there, Dan," she said, "it seemed to me the most *ridiculous* thing—the most preposterous thing, that she should be here at all! That through anything you and I ever did she should belong here, between us, deciding whether or not we should see each other again!"

"I know," Dan said.

"Divorce is a funny thing, isn't it?"

"That's what I was thinking!"

"Maybe it isn't this way with everyone, but it seems to me—why, just that you and I belong together," Cassy said, feeling her way, speaking as if she only thought aloud. "Father and mother and children—that's the way it ought to be. There oughtn't to be anything—anything—that could make it wrong for you just to settle down here now and have lunch with us, and afterward go walking on the beach—and watch the fog come in—and hear the bells——"

"Don't," Dan said briefly, still turning the pages of the magazine.

"Wouldn't that be *heaven,* Dan?"

"It would be for me," he said a little gruffly, not looking up.

"Nothing really ends marriage, does it, Dan?"

"Not—if it's the real thing, I suppose."

"I know we've both made lots of mistakes," Cassy said, and paused.

"I—not you."

"Both of us! But it seems so absurd that we have to go on paying forever. You go to Australia—the children grow up without their father—I'm lonely, you're lonely, Dulce's lonely."

"It's the limit!" Dan said in the silence, gruffly, and Cassy laughed forlornly, helplessly, at the inadequacy of the word. He was silent for a moment; then he shrugged his shoulders. "Nothing to say," he observed.

"No, nothing to say. We'll just have to pick up the pieces and do the best we can now, Dan. I'll go on, up at the ranch, Dulce will be alone at La Lomita, and you'll be in Australia. That's all we can do."

"No use—trying to talk her over, trying to get free?" he asked. "No," he answered himself, "we can't go back!"

"Oh, no, not now. It would only make everything worse for us all." Cassy paused. "It would never be the same," she added sadly.

"I suppose not."

"You can see, by her coming all the way down and by her giving me these letters, Dan, how bitterly she feels. She wouldn't have risked these—she knows I'll burn them!—if she hadn't been furious. These are probably the only love letters Dulce ever had," Cassy mused, looking at them. "She's not going to let you be happy again if she can help it!"

"No, I see that."

"She says these are the letters you wrote her during that winter when we were so unhappy, when the children were sick and I was all worn out."

"Yep."

"She says you kept promising her that we would be divorced."

"It's true," he said.

"And the letter I wrote you, Dan?" Cassy whispered.

"Yep."

"You showed her that?"

"Yep."

"Oh, Dan, Dan, how could you do that!"

She had the packet in her hand; now she leaned her elbow on the mantel and pressed packet and fingers against her eyes.

"I don't know," Dan said, clearing his throat. "It's all—like a dream," he said.

Cassy flung the letters into the dead ashes of the fire, stooped, a slender brown woman with a cap of dark curls covering her head, to pile light wood upon them, to stir up the last pink embers.

"Let me do that," Dan offered in the old way, and for a moment in the little homely service they were man and wife again.

"The kids look wonderful, Cass," he said, straightening up.

"They are wonderful!"

"Cassy, if you could forgive me," Dan began hoarsely, sud-

denly close beside her, leaning over her but not touching her. "If you could forgive me for being a damn *fool!*" he said.

"Why, it wasn't all you, Dan," she answered, with her honest blue eyes raised soberly to his.

"Oh, it was!" he muttered. He walked to the window, and Cassy stood by the mantel, one arm and one hand resting along it.

"Well—you're all right. You're the most wonderful woman in the world," he said; "everyone adores you! And you have the kids."

"More than my sister has, collecting prints in Paris!" Cassy agreed, in the pause.

"I have nothing!" Dan said.

She went to him and put her two arms along his arms and gripped his shoulders with her brown fingers.

"You have me, Dan!" she said. "I've never stopped loving you, I never will! There's something—something to think about when you go away."

"Cassy!" he whispered, a great hope in his haggard face, "could I ever come back to you?"

"Let's not say that now," she said, frowning, trembling.

"Not now! But—but can I write you, Cass?"

"Now and then, if you like."

"And will you write me?"

"Sometimes!"

He put his fair head down on her shoulder.

"Oh, my God, you give me hope again—you give me hope again! It'll all come right some day, won't it, Cassy? I'll have my boy and my baby and my girl back, and we'll have little picnics of chops and buns, and we'll work out the puzzles together."

"I don't know——" she faltered, looking away, her lip shaking. Tears brimmed her blue eyes.

Dan stood watching her a moment in silence. Then, with a suddenly businesslike air, he said resolutely:

"Well, I'm going. I sail to-morrow, and my contract is for a year. It's a rotten hard job, and I'm going to work like a dog. I'll let you know——"

He glanced toward the closed kitchen door.

"What about the children, Cass? Shall I say good-bye to them?"

"I think not, Dan," she said uncertainly, after a moment of hesitation. "They love you so—Margaret cried so bitterly when we left Napa."

"Margaret did?" he asked a little huskily. Tears stood in his own eyes.

"Suppose you just speak to them, Dan, without any good-byes. They're such tender-hearted little things."

"I'll do that, then," he agreed. His face, Cassy remembered afterward, was ghastly.

She went to the dining-room door, called through to the kitchen.

"Inga, send the children in, will you? Wash off their mouths and tell them I want them! They've taken a fancy," Cassy explained to Dan, resolutely matter-of-fact, "to sandwich lunches, which they eat with a large assortment of their friends, on the porch steps."

"You give them a wonderful childhood, Cass," he said humbly.

She had closed the dining-room door behind her; now the knob turned slowly, as children's fingers might turn it, and it was opened from the other side. But instead of little Margaret and Tom it was Dulce who came in, and closed it again behind her, and stood facing the other two with the livid face and glittering eyes of a madwoman.

The instant Cassy saw her she knew that they were all lost, and that this was what she had been expecting, been fearing, all through the strange uneasy hours of this endless foggy day. The room—the world, was suddenly ringed with great spreading black blots, like the blots on a breaking soap bubble.

She whispered something, and Dulce said in a whining voice: "You thought you could have it all your own way, *didn't* you, Mr. Daniel Wallace!"

Cassy heard Dan shout and saw him spring forward toward Dulce.

"I'm all right, Cass—it's all right. But, for God's sake, keep out of the way—keep the kids out!"

Then the report of the revolver Dulce carried cut sharply across the voices, and after that there was an endless minute of silence in the room. An acrid smell of gunpowder penetrated the air; the smoke mushroomed slowly up against the low ceiling. Dan's letters, under the heaped light wood, fired suddenly and sent up a cheerful spurt of blaze. Cassy's eyes, wandering vaguely to the windows, saw fog—fog—fog pressing against them.

She wished she could wake up. She was bending backward against a wall with one hand tight against her heart, and her mouth filled with water.

"There!" Dulce said, in a dry, quiet, triumphant voice. "You thought I was afraid—you thought I was just talking! *That's* how much I was talking—that's how much I was afraid!"

Dan had stopped on his way toward her, had sunk into a chair in an oddly twisted position.

"That's the time you got me," he whispered. And turning his eyes to Cassy he breathed. "She's done it, Cass."

Cassy, somehow, had the smoking pistol in her hands. Now she was forcing it upon Inga.

"Inga, throw it away—get the doctor—get help——"

"Give it to me," Dulce said coolly, wrenching it from Inga's hands. She laughed, turning away. "I'm not going to hurt *you,* Cassy," she said.

They were alone in the room, she and Dan. Inga had gone, Dulce had disappeared. Cassy was on her knees, the beloved head was limp against her cheek.

"I think it only—grazed the under arm—I don't know," he said.

"You're all right, Danny, you're all right, Dan!" she whispered, her fingers tearing at his shirt to expose the purple circle that was just above his heart. She jerked at his coat. Dan feebly helped her throw it aside.

"The doctor's going to be here in a few minutes, Dan."

There were women, white faced and swift and with frightened eyes, in the room.

"Sheets, Inga," Cassy said. The pillows where Tommy and Margaret sometimes scrambled and pummeled each other were flung to the floor. There were white pillows, sheets—Dan's shirt was open—some woman cut his undershirt away. Cassy remembered the firm, hard, tanned flesh of his throat and breast; the pattern of his bathing suit was tattooed there.

They laid him back against white pillows; he did not loosen his hold on Cassy's hand or move his eyes from her face. But when the old doctor had finished with the strips of adhesive tape and the hasty bandage to stem the red oozing from the purple hole he looked up to smile.

"No use, eh?" his shadow of a voice said with all Dan's old good humor.

"I wouldn't say that," the physician answered gently. "We can tell nothing yet; you'll have to be moved, you know—an X-ray —we'll have to locate that bullet—see just where it is; no probing until we know. Just don't make any effort," he said to Dan, watching him.

"I'm all right," Dan said.

"Who did it—what is it—was it a pistol?" a babble of hushed voices said in the kitchen.

Cassy was out there; they were all silent. She heard and saw nothing but the doctor; his words seemed to hurt her head like little pricking nails. She saw spinach, fresh green spinach, soaking in one of Inga's clean blue saucepans. Spinach—a long time ago she had bought spinach in a foggy market street.

The doctor had to report this. Oh, yes, report it, she said hurriedly. Then she said to the doctor that they might have another opinion; get a man from San Francisco. But he was so gentle with her, so kind, that after that she only heard herself saying in a frightened whisper, "Then I'll stay with him—I'll not leave him again."

So she went back to Dan's side, and he opened his sunken eyes and looked at her with a faint shadow of a smile. They were alone

again. The room still smelled of gunpowder, but someone had opened a window upon the foggy garden. The green droplight still burned above Cassy's littered desk.

She knelt down beside the couch and took in her own brown hands the weak, cool hands that had always been so strong and warm.

"Feeling pretty comfortable?"

"I keep being afraid—" Dan said painfully and wisely, like a child—"I keep being afraid that I'm going to draw a deep breath. I know I'm not, of course. But I keep thinking I am!"

Not in this world, Dan, she thought. The phrase flashed through her mind as if it were a line from a play.

"Have they all gone, Cass?"

"No. Some of them are still out there."

"Do you mind 'em?"

"Oh, no, no."

"They mean it kindly," Dan explained, again with a child's sweet, mysterious air of understanding.

"I know they do."

"She just went crazy, didn't she, Cass?"

"Dulce? Yes. Poor Dulce."

"Poor Dulce," he repeated obediently. "It would hurt me like hell if I breathed deep, Cass."

"What did you say, dear?"

"Don't—want to—breathe deep."

"No, of course not."

After a minute he said:

"Do you know what I thought? I thought we were back in the old room at the Cannon house, Cass. Remember?"

"Remember——" she said.

"And I thought I'd come home feeling rotten, and you'd made me lie down, and that you were taking care of me."

The blue eyes burning in the brown face were close to his own, Cassy's faithful eyes that had never changed to him.

"Well, that was a happy thing to think, dear."

"Remember that old room, and the big flat bed with the brass

knobs, and the way we'd lean on the window sill, and look down at the people in the street, and talk about ourselves?"

"Ah, it was a happy time, Dan!"

"They tried to bully us—that night in your father's library—but they couldn't do it! You came over and stood beside me and said, 'Wait for me!' "

Cassy did not speak.

Suddenly Dan went on in a loud voice:

"You bet your life I'll wait for you! Cass," he whispered, alarm suddenly in his heavy eyes, "am I going on—without you?"

She smiled at him; went on as if she had not heard.

"Remember the nights we'd go out shopping, Dan, and come back with those big warty green pickles?"

"And two doughnuts, for you, in a greasy bag!"

"Oh, my doughnuts—that's right! I'd forgotten that I used to buy two doughnuts for five cents."

"Remember the hot-water bag?"

"Oh, Danny, and the tea you made me that night, when I was so cold!"

"I was always so happy, Cass, when I could do anything for you. I mean, you were always doing things for me, but—gosh, I used to love you when you felt sick and rotten and I could take care of you!"

"Remember the time you were hunting for a job, and we were on our uppers, and I sold your chauffeur's uniforms?"

"Say, I'd forgotten that!" A faint echo of the old ring was in his voice. "Cass," he said, "you were an awful good sport to marry your father's chauffeur and stand by him! You were an awful good sport, do you know that?"

"I did what I wanted to do, Dan."

"You weren't doing what you wanted to do in the Fulton Street flat!"

"Ah, that was terrible!" she agreed with a laugh and a shudder of remonstrance.

"Remember the baby's colic?"

"Wasn't he naughty? Wasn't it dreadful?"

"Gosh," Dan said, "I used to think that kid would have colic on the day he graduated from college."

He clung to her hands.

"Cass, the marvelous thing was to have had each other! We cut each other out of the herd—you for my girl, and I for your man, and no divorce—not a hundred divorces can change that!"

"I feel it so, Dan."

"Don't you feel sorry for people, Cass, who have to go all through life without being poor, and in love, and on their own together?"

"Dan, they miss everything if they miss that."

And without stirring a muscle of the firm arms that held him as he closed his eyes she said:

"Inga?"

"Yes, Mrs. Wallace."

"Build that fire up a little, will you?"

She could hear the maid, in the shadow behind her, obeying.

"Are the children there?"

"Oh, no, ma'am. They went over to Mrs. Forrest's."

The pink firelight strengthened and mingled with the dim, muffled daylight at the windows and the trim cone of gold light that fell on the desk from the dangling lamp. The clock said twenty minutes past two, but Cassy could not think whether it was daytime or night.

Dan's breathing, by imperceptible degrees, had grown more labored. There was a wet shine upon his sunburned face; his closed eyes were sunk into deep pockets.

"Always loved you . . ." he whispered.

Cassy neither moved nor spoke.

"Now I know—" he whispered, opening his eyes—"now I know why I'm afraid to breathe deep, Cass."

"Don't move, Danny."

"No, I won't. But—you know this is the end, don't you? Kiss me, Cassy. That's why the doctor went away."

"It frightens me when you try to talk, Dan."

"Just two words. Before I go, Cass, here's what I want to say

to you. I—I want you to be happy, Cass. If ever anything comes along that—that would make you happy, I want you to know that it's my one hope, leaving you now—that happiness will come to you. If it comes, will you remember to say, 'This is what Dan wanted'?"

"I'll try to."

"Listen," he whispered. "It was all my fault—all the happiness thrown away—all the days and nights we might have had with our boy and girl—all the picnics——"

He shut his eyes.

"All my fault," he repeated, suddenly looking at her again. And now the strange soap-bubble blots of blackness were in his brilliant sunken eyes. "But you can forgive me, Cass?" he faltered, his lips trembling. "You can forgive me, now?"

"Danny," she stammered, her face streaming tears, "we were both wrong! Forgive you? Why, my darling, I love you!"

For one instant the old laughing, loving look flashed into his colorless face, and his stiff lips smiled; then there was a shudder that shook her, shook the couch, as well as his own long frame, and then silence. He drew his hand spasmodically to his heart, and as Cassy bowed her dark head over the wounded breast she breathed for the last time the strength and sweetness, the vague aroma of shaving soap and homespun and tobacco that was Dan—that carried her back to the first wild kisses of her girlhood in the old Guerrero Street house, so many years ago.

Chapter XXVIII

THE street was closed for remaking; the new hospital, brave in creamy brick and spreading great wings, stood on the rise of the hill, only two blocks away. When the big car came to the barricade the lady riding therein leaned forward and explained to the chauffeur that she and the little girl would walk the rest of the way.

They got out: a slim, graceful brown woman, with bronzy plumes curling about her small hat, and a dark blue suit banded with fur, and a girl of perhaps eight, tall and proud, with a mane of bright hair falling on her shoulders. The little girl was in dark blue, too, her brimmed blue hat had a band of fur, and her collar was a buttoned strip of the same beaver.

They left in the car a big colored woman on whose lap a girl baby of something less than half a year was sitting. Before they parted the lady leaned back from the sidewalk and took the smaller child in her arms.

Expertly handling the baby, the woman kissed the fuzzy sweet back of the little neck, where the tight cap stopped, and straightened the layers of white capes and coat.

"You'll be out near the Aquarium, Sintilla?"

"Yas'm—yas, Mis' Jessop."

"And you're sure, Margaret," the lady asked, turning to the little girl, "that you wouldn't rather go with Martha and Sintilla?"

"Oh, no, Mother!"

"Well, then, we'll pick you up near the Aquarium, Sintilla, as soon as the board meeting is over," the lady said. She and the little girl walked through the barricade and began to mount the easy rise of the hill toward the hospital.

"Mother, what street is this?" Margaret Wallace asked, looking about in great approval upon its disorder of shabby houses, empty lots, sheds and fences set crosswise.

"This is—wait until we get to the corner, darling," Cassy said. "This isn't so very far from where I used to live when I was a

little girl. Up that way, and about four blocks across, was Grandma Pringle's house. It's torn down now, and Aunt Gertrude has put flats there.

"Why, Margaret," she added a moment later, in an odd tone. "This is Shotwell Street!"

"Is that a good street, Mother? Look, Mom, that little boy and girl have rabbits over there! Look, Mom!"

"Wait a minute," Cassy said, thinking aloud. Her brown face had paled a little, her breath came quickly, while she studied the street corners with brightened eyes. "Come up this way, Margaret," she said suddenly.

They walked a quick block and halted before a bulkheaded corner, upon which an old mansarded house, once painted red, now faded to a dirty brown, was falling into decay. A large fresh sign, set at an angle in the dilapidated garden, announced that the "Cannon Arms Apartment House" would shortly be erected upon this incomparable site.

Margaret looked up at her mother in surprise; Cassy was holding her hand firmly, but she did not seem conscious of her daughter's presence.

"*This* isn't Grandma Pringle's old house, Mother?"

"Oh, no, darling."

The old brick steps, where dried grass sprouted, and over which the sprawling periwinkle was complete victor now; the old rusty garden faucet to which Mrs. Harney used forlornly to attach a few lengths of leaking hose; the dirty pampas grasses; and the brown ungroomed bushes of marguerites.

Nobody was using the stable now, winter storms had brought a deluge of mud across the old driveway; a clothes line still hung brown and rusty from the Terrys' windows, but its supporting pulley on the barn was gone. Many of the windows in the ramshackle old building were broken, and others had been crudely boarded. On the paths advertising and political pamphlets were matted, rain soaked, and sunburned into a dry brown. Under the dreary old willow in the side yard the earth was covered with dropped branches.

"Mother, why are you looking at that old house?"

"I didn't hear you, dear."

"Why are you looking at that old house?"

"I knew some people who lived there, Margaret."

"Oh? And were they poor, Mother?"

"What is it, darling?"

"Were they poor?"

"They—yes, they were poor."

"And did you and Daddy help them, Mother?"

"This was long before I was married to Daddy, Margaret."

"Oh, and was my own Daddy living?"

"Yes, he was living then."

"And was I a teenty baby?"

"You weren't even born."

"Mother, did Aunt Dulce live here?"

"Aunt Dulce! What on earth made you think of her?" Cassy, versed in the strange prescience of children, moved her tranced gaze and looked down at her eldest daughter for the first time.

"I don't know. But before she killed herself, you know, Mother——"

"Wait a minute, Margaret. Who told you about that?"

"Barbara Forrest did."

"What did she tell you?"

"She said Aunt Dulce stopped her car at Moss Landing, and it was all foggy, and she got frightened at the fog and shot herself."

Cassy frowned.

"I don't think little girls like you and Barbara ought to talk about dreadful things like that. That was years ago."

"We don't, Mother. But she told me that when I was only a little girl."

Cassy was studying the house again. Now she started up the precarious steps between the collapsing bulkheads. With the puzzled Margaret at her side she walked up the broken, rough path between the splintered rows of inverted stout bottles and mounted the chipped, burned, split steps to the porch.

The front door, flanked by old fanlights in colored glass, hung

laxly ajar; nothing worth stealing had been left in the old Cannon mansion. Gas fixtures—the heavy old fixtures in coppered brass—had been torn away, and paper hung in discolored strips from the bared dirty plaster of the walls. The place smelled of decay, vermin, dirt, and damp.

The old atmosphere enveloped her. Cassy caught the odor of carbolic acid once more. She looked into old Miss Porter's room, Miss Porter who had always claimed direct descent from Lord Baltimore and had had the ivory glove stretcher on her mantel. At the French windows soiled, soggy strings of the old Nottingham lace curtains still hung; through the dirty broken panes winter sunshine fell cheerfully on the rotted matting on the floor. Cassy remembered the old framed photographs of a Maryland mansion that had left those darker squares upon the faded paper of the walls.

The Terrys' suite had been changed, a cheap beaver-board partition introduced to make it even more squalid and cramped than was Cassy's memory of it. On the stairs leading to the floor above rags of carpet still clung.

Cassy, with Margaret beside her, mounted them; she opened a door at the top.

There was the old room, with the morning sunlight slanting into it in the old way, across the wide-open window sills. The more than ten years had not changed it much, it had always been shabby and bare, always what it was now, under the low roof. And beyond it was the kitchen closet, with its window, and its black, grimy little sink, and the shelves an eager dark-haired girl had papered with her own hands for the reception of five-and-ten-cent store spoons and glasses and four-cent blue bowls.

Ten years since two exultant runaways had mounted these stairs and taken possession of this kingdom in the name of youth and adventure and love. They twisted like so many knives in the woman's heart, as she stood in the little kitchen, staring—staring. . . .

She remembered the big hand that had driven that rusty nail into the door to hold an eighty-nine-cent blue apron. She remem-

bered the little frying pan that, swinging on its hook, had put that disk of grease stain on the wall beside the sink.

Under the window lay the old panorama of roofs and yards and streets, the old friendliness and shabbiness of the Mission hills, steeped in bright, soft winter sunlight. The children of that old day were grown, and in high school now, but other children, in the same well-washed, faded overalls, had taken their places.

The girl who had cooked for her husband up here in this eyrie above the city, who had awaited his step on the stairs, shifting potatoes to their bowl, breaking eggs, singing above the noise of running water and steaming kettle and frying meat, was a rich man's wife now, and she loved him dearly, even if her love was something less than the deep devotion of his own. Cassy knew now that Macallister Jessop was a finer man, a wiser man, a gentler and more brilliant man than Dan Wallace had ever been; she knew that to him she was the captured dream—the woman whose looks, whose love, whose blue eyes, whose quick response, whose manner with his servants, his friends, his children, himself, had achieved all and more than his humble hopes of married happiness had ever dared to imagine. In these ten years she had left the old standards of the Cannon house so far behind her that she had not dared to tell even Dan's little daughter how closely this bare, odorous, shabby attic room was connected with her life and her mother's life.

Yet in this hour everything else was forgotten, and she was Dan's young wife again, going into gales of laughter over their finances, laying her loving brown cheek against his shabby coat before she sent him forth to seek his fortune in the morning, sleeping with her dark head on his shoulder at night.

Again the fish horns were droning in the street below on a hot spring morning, and the sounds of a bump and a child's wild scream were mounting up from the Terrys' flat below. Again the big half onion was on the window sill, and beside it the can of cream with its contents darkened into a brown rim where the puncture was; again the ruff of wet grounds was choking the spout of the cheap tin coffee pot.

And again a sick, weak, frightened girl was talking about her baby, interrupting her nervous planning with bursts of young excitement, of sheer mother love; again on the bedside table were the sewing basket, and the striped flannelette wrapper, half made, whose every languid stitch marked an hour of physical misery for the wife of Dan Wallace.

Tommy was still a child; he was only now, proudly, "in fractions"—and yet the days of that little unborn Tommy seemed æons ago! And Dan, who had been so vital, so loving, so full of hopes and plans for their future together, had been lying now for two long years in his grave, beside Dulce's grave, in a country burying ground.

Cassy stood at the window, looking down.

"If we could have known, Dan," she said, half aloud. "If we could have seen it all coming . . ."

Well, meanwhile the board meeting was waiting, and then Collins would pick them up with the car again and they would go to the Aquarium and take delicious little rosy Martha home for her noon bottle and her nap. And to-night there would be the opera opening, with Mr. and Mrs. Macallister Jessop and a group of their friends in a box.

Indeed, to-night a part of that old silly, romantic dream of hers might well be repeated, as Cassy had been amused and stirred to have it repeated, many times. It had been on an opera night that Mac had asked her, that final, different time, to marry him; she had swept into a big hotel room filled with waiting men—Joe White, and his friend from New York, and Butler Foster, as well as Mac, had all been going with Cassy to the opera that night, and one of them had sent her flowers.

"Who sent me the Russian violets? Who knows that I adore Russian violets?" she had demanded. And a moment later Mac had drawn her aside to say in a low tone, "May I come back after the opera to-night, Cassy? I want to speak to you—you know why."

And suddenly, through all her veins had run the sweet weakness of surrender—surrender to his love, his patience and gener-

osity, his goodness and wiseness. And she had smiled at him kindly as she had said, "Do come back, Mac. I'm going to Napa again to-morrow, you know, and if we're to talk at all . . ."

And suddenly she had been back in the old dream—had been the beautiful woman meeting a group of men, asking the gay question about the flowers, giving the kindly answer to the hoarse undertone request.

She stood in a dream now, remembering it all, and Margaret, holding to her hand, sighed patiently.

Suddenly Cassy roused herself and smiled down at the child. Margaret smiled hopefully back. She did not think much of this smelly, shabby old house, with its decaying, empty rooms.

"Come on, Margaret," Cassy said. She took one long last look about her, and laid her bare hand for a minute on the window sill with a touch that was almost a caress. Then she and Margaret walked down the disreputable stairway together, and past the dangling, broken doors of the deserted, dirty rooms, and so out across the shaky porch and through the bulkhead to the street.

"I must say I don't think your friends had a very pretty house, Mother," Margaret said.

She said it twice. But her mother, walking up and on, toward the new hospital, had a funny, absent look in her blue eyes and made no answer.

THE END